



TIPPING THE VELVET

based on the book by **SARAH WATERS** *a new adaptation by* **LAURA WADE**



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**Lyric Hammersmith and the Royal Lyceum Theatre Edinburgh
present**

TIPPING THE VELVET

based on the book by **SARAH WATERS** *a new adaptation by* **LAURA WADE**

**First performance at the Lyric Hammersmith
on Friday 18 September 2015**

**First performance at the Royal Lyceum Theatre Edinburgh
on Wednesday 28 October 2015**

TIPPING THE VELVET

based on the book by **SARAH WATERS** *a new adaptation by* **LAURA WADE**

Cast in alphabetical order

Walter/Father/Archie/Band **Jared Ashe**

Diana **Kirsty Besterman**

Chairman **David Cardy**

Mother/Dendy/Jex/Annie **Amanda Hadingue**

Sweet Alice/Joseph/Band **Ru Hamilton**

Florence/Alice **Adelle Leonce**

Nancy **Sally Messham**

Kitty **Laura Rogers**

Ralph/Charlie **Andy Rush**

Blake/Band **Sarah Vezmar**

Other roles played by members of the young ensemble

Tamara Camacho, Grace Frogley, Georgie Lord, Aasiya Shah

Creative Team

Directed by **Lyndsey Turner**

Design by **Lizzie Clachan**

Choreography by **Alistair David**

Lighting by **Jon Clark**

Music by **Michael Bruce**

Sound by **Nick Manning**

Illusions by **Richard Pinner**

Musical Direction by **Dan Jackson**

Casting by **Julia Horan CDG**

Resident Associate Director [for the Lyric] **Ola Ince**

Associate Casting by **Lotte Hines**

Circus Consultants **Alice Brett, Katherine Arnold, Amy Panter, National Centre for Circus Arts**

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Company Stage Manager [for the Lyceum] **Daniel Dixon**

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Assistant Stage Manager **Cleo Maynard**

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Producer **Peter Holland**

Production Manager [for the Lyric] **Seamus Benson**

Production Manager [for the Lyceum] **David Butterworth**

Set Construction **The Lyceum Workshops**

Chandelier by **Acrobat Productions**, Cloths printed by **Prompt Side**, Puppets by **Hayley Gibbs**

Press Agency [for the Lyric] **Jo Allan PR**

SARAH WATERS (Writer)

Sarah has written six novels: *Tipping the Velvet* (1998, Betty Trask Award); *Affinity* (1999, Somerset Maugham Award, the Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year Award); *Fingersmith* (2002, shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and the Orange Prize, and winner of the South Bank Show Award for Literature and the CWA Historical Dagger); *The Night Watch* (2006, shortlisted for the Orange Prize and the Man Booker Prize); *The Little Stranger* (2009, shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and the South Bank Show Literature Award) and *The Paying Guests* (2014, shortlisted for the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction).

She was included in Granta's prestigious list of 'Best of Young British Novelists 2003', and in the same year was voted Author of the Year at the British Book Awards and the BA Conference, and won the Waterstones Author of the Year Award. TV and film adaptations include *Tipping the Velvet*, *Fingersmith* and *The Night Watch* for the BBC and *Affinity* for ITV. For the stage, Sarah co-wrote, with Christopher Green, *The Frozen Scream* which premiered in December 2014 at the Cardiff Millennium Centre and Birmingham Hippodrome. A new stage adaption of *Fingersmith* (written by Alexa Junge, directed by Bill Rauch) also premiered in February 2015 at The Oregon Shakespeare Festival. In April 2015 she joined the Council of the Society of Authors.

LAURA WADE (Playwright)

Laura's play *Posh*, directed by Lyndsey Turner, opened at the Royal Court in 2010, and subsequently played at the Duke of York's in the West End in 2012. It was adapted into the film *The Riot Club*, for which Laura wrote the screenplay, and which premiered at the Toronto Film Festival in 2014. Her other theatre work includes *Kreutzer vs Kreutzer*, a play for two actors and chamber ensemble (2010 Australian tour including Sydney Opera House, and 2015 at the Globe Theatre); *Alice*, a new adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland* (Sheffield Crucible); *Other Hands* (Soho Theatre); *Breathing Corpses* (Royal Court) and *Colder Than Here* (Soho Theatre and MCC Theater, New York). In 2006 she won the Pearson Most Promising Playwright Award and the George Devine Award and was nominated for an Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in an Affiliate Theatre.

THE COMPANY

CAST in alphabetical order

JARED ASHE (Walter/Father/Archie/Band)

FOR THE LYRIC: *Raymond Briggs' Father Christmas*

OTHER THEATRE CREDITS INCLUDE: *Brief Encounter* (Windsor Theatre Royal); *The Low Road* (Royal Court); *Radio Times* (Watermill Theatre); *Black Coffee* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *Up 'N' Under*, *The Taming Of The Shrew* (Queen's Theatre); *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Mikado* (Stephen Joseph Theatre); *Oh What A Lovely War* (Basingstoke Haymarket); *Privates on Parade* (West Yorkshire Playhouse) and *Arturo Ui* (Watford Palace).

KIRSTY BESTERMAN (Diana)

FOR THE LYCEUM: *Private Lives*

THEATRE CREDITS INCLUDE: *Arcadia* (English Touring Theatre/UK Tour); *Separate Tables*, *Dangerous Corner* (Salisbury Playhouse); *Tonight at 8.30* (English Touring Theatre); *The Precariat*, *Foxfinder* (Finborough Theatre); *The School for Scandal* (Park Theatre); *Playhouse Creatures* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *Othello* (Cheek by Jowl) and *The Merchant of Venice* (Shakespeare's Globe).

TELEVISION AND FILM CREDITS INCLUDE: *Father Brown*, *Silent Witness*, *Foyle's War* and *Chicken*.

TAMARA CAMACHO (Emily/Young Ensemble)

Tamara is a member of the Lyric Young Company. *Tipping the Velvet* will be her first professional production.

DAVID CARDY (Chairman)

FOR THE LYRIC: *Ghost Stories* (also Duke of York's/Liverpool Playhouse)

OTHER THEATRE CREDITS INCLUDE: *Made in Dagenham* (Adelphi); *Dreamboats and Petticoats* (Savoy/Wyndham's); *Basket Case* (UK Tour); *Caught in the Net*, *Not Now Darling* (The Mill at Sonning); *Treasure Island* (Rose Theatre Kingston) and *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Nottingham Playhouse/UK Tour).

TELEVISION AND FILM CREDITS INCLUDE: *Birds Of A Feather*, *The Bill*, *No Sweat*, *Prick Up Your Ears*, *The Keep* and *Three Steps to Heaven*.

GRACE FROGLEY (Jennie/Young Ensemble)

Grace is a member of the Lyric Young Company. *Tipping the Velvet* will be her first professional production.

AMANDA HADINGUE (Mother/Dendy/Jex/Annie)

THEATRE CREDITS INCLUDE: *The Ghost Train* (Royal Exchange); *Playing for Time* (Sheffield Crucible); *Small Family Business* (National Theatre); *Rising Damp* (UK Tour); *The Master and Margarita* (Complicité); *Hamlet* (Shakespeare's Globe); *Get Santa* (Royal Court); *The*

Merchant of Venice, Taming of the Shrew (RSC) and *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* (National Theatre of Scotland/Royal Court).

TELEVISION AND FILM CREDITS INCLUDE: *Holby City, Jonathan Creek, Lead Balloon, Black Pond* and *The Queen*.

RU HAMILTON (Sweet Alice/Joseph/Band)

Ru has recently graduated from the actor-musicianship course at Rose Bruford. Whilst training Ru took part in two R&D residencies at the North Wall, Oxford with Iron Shoes and Theatre Ad Infinitum. *Tipping the Velvet* will be his first professional production.

ADELLE LEONCE (Florence/Alice)

FOR THE LYRIC: Secret Theatre Company

OTHER THEATRE CREDITS INCLUDE: *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (National Theatre).

TELEVISION CREDITS INCLUDE: *Shameless, Vera* and *In the Garden*.

GEORGIE LORD (Dickie/Young Ensemble)

Georgie is a member of the Lyric Young Company. She graduated from LAMDA's one year Foundation Course in 2014. *Tipping the Velvet* will be her first professional production.

SALLY MESSHAM (Nancy)

Sally has recently graduated from RADA. *Tipping the Velvet* will be her professional stage debut.

TELEVISION CREDITS INCLUDE: *Midwinter of the Spirit*.

LAURA ROGERS (Kitty)

FOR THE LYCEUM: *Pressure*

OTHER THEATRE CREDITS INCLUDES: *An Ideal Husband, Blue Remembered Hills, Hay Fever* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *Masterpieces* (Royal Court); *The 39 Steps* (Criterion); *55 Days* (Hampstead); *Macbeth* and *As You Like It* (Shakespeare's Globe).

TELEVISION CREDITS INCLUDE: *New Tricks, Dates, Dr Who, The Smoke, Law and Order: UK, Midsomer Murders, Bad Girls* and *The Sins*.

ANDY RUSH (Ralph/Charlie)

FOR THE LYRIC: *Dick Whittington and his Cat*

OTHER THEATRE CREDITS INCLUDE: *Unidentified Item in the Bagging Area* (Pink Snail Theatre Company); *Jumpers for Goalposts* (Paines Plough/UK Tour); *A Midsummer Night's Dream, Twelfth Night* (Lamb House, Rye); *Hello/Goodbye* (Hampstead) and *The Kitchen Sink* (Bush Theatre).

TELEVISION AND FILM CREDITS INCLUDE: *Waterloo Road, New Tricks, Tommy Cooper – Not Like That, Like This, ID2:Shadwell Army, Wizards vs Aliens, Here & Now* and *Casualty*.

AASIYA SHAH (Mary/Young Ensemble)

Aasiya is a member of the Lyric Young Company. *Tipping the Velvet* will be her first professional production.

SARAH VEZMAR (Blake/Band)

THEATRE CREDITS INCLUDE: *Hindle Wakes*, *Alice In Wonderland* (Bolton Octagon); *The Comedy Of Errors*, *The Secret Garden* (Grosvenor Park Open Air Theatre); *Refugee Boy* (West Yorkshire Playhouse/UK Tour); *Can't Stand Up For Falling Down*, *Legend Of King Arthur* (York Theatre Royal); *Sugar Daddies* (Oldham Coliseum/Harrogate Theatre); *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (The Marine Theatre/UK Tour) and *Cinderella* (Liverpool Playhouse).

CREATIVE TEAM

LYNDSEY TURNER (Director)

THEATRE CREDITS INCLUDE: *Hamlet* (Barbican); *Chimerica* (Almeida/Harold Pinter); *Fathers and Sons*, *Philadelphia*, *Here I Come!* (Donmar Warehouse); *Posh* (also Duke of York's), *Contractions*, *A Miracle*, *Our Private Life* (Royal Court); *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, *Edgar and Annabel*, *There is a War* (National Theatre); *Joseph K*, *Nocturnal* (Gate Theatre); *The Way of the World*, *Alice* (Sheffield Crucible); *My Romantic History* (Traverse/Bush/Sheffield Crucible) and *The Lesson* (Arcola).

LIZZIE CLACHAN (Designer)

THEATRE CREDITS INCLUDE: *The Skriker* (Manchester International Festival/Royal Exchange); *Carmen Disruption* (Almeida); *The Beaux' Stratagem*, *Treasure Island*, *Edward II*, *Port* (National Theatre); *Fireworks*, *Adler & Gibb*, *Gastronauts*, *The Witness*, *Jumpy* (also Duke of York's) (Royal Court); *All My Sons* (Regent's Park Open Air Theatre); *Happy Days* (Sheffield Crucible); *Longing*, *The Trial of Ubu*, *Tiger Country* (Hampstead); *I'll Be the Devil*, *Days of Significance* and *The American Pilot* (RSC).

Lizzie co-founded Shunt in 1998.

ALISTAIR DAVID (Choreographer)

THEATRE CREDITS INCLUDE: *Anything Goes* (also UK Tour), *Oliver*, *My Fair Lady* (Sheffield Crucible); *Seven Brides For Seven Brothers*, *The Sound Of Music* (Regent's Park Open Air Theatre); *Posh* (Royal Court/Duke of York's); *Kiss Me Kate* (BBC Proms); *42nd Street Gala* (London Palladium) and *Radio Times* (Watermill/UK Tour).

OTHER CREDITS INCLUDE: Robbie Williams' Worldwide Concert Tour *Swings Both Ways*.

TELEVISION AND FILM CREDITS INCLUDE: Channel 4, Nickelodeon and MTV.

JON CLARK (Lighting)

THEATRE CREDITS INCLUDE: *King Charles III* (also Wyndham's/Music Box Theatre Broadway), *American Psycho*, *King Lear* (Almeida); *A Street Car Named Desire* (Young Vic); *The Beaux' Stratagem*, *Othello*, *The Effect*, *Hamlet*, *Collaborators*, *Greenland*, *The Cat in the Hat*, *Pains of Youth* (National Theatre); *The Ruling Class* (Trafalgar Studios); *The Commitments* (Palace Theatre) and *Made in Dagenham* (Adelphi).

OTHER CREDITS INCLUDE: *Król Roger* (Royal Opera House), *Written on Skin* (Royal Opera House, Aix-en-Provence, Amsterdam, Lincoln Center).

MICHAEL BRUCE (Music)

THEATRE CREDITS INCLUDE: *The Beaux' Stratagem*, *Man and Superman*, *Strange Interlude*, *Men Should Weep* (National Theatre); *The Vote*, *Privacy*, *Coriolanus*, *Trelawny of the Wells*, *Berenice*, *Philadelphia Here I Come!*, *The Recruiting Officer* (Donmar Warehouse); *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Candide* (RSC); *Other Desert Cities*, *The Winslow Boy* and *Noises Off* (The Old Vic).

Michael is Composer in Residence at the Donmar Warehouse.

NICK MANNING (Sound)

FOR THE LYRIC: Secret Theatre Company, *Ghost Stories* (also Duke of York's/Liverpool Playhouse/Panasonic Theatre, Toronto), *Metamorphosis* (also UK/International Tour), *The Chair Plays*, *Morning*, *Saved*, and *Roald Dahl's Twisted Tales* (also UK Tour).

OTHER THEATRE CREDITS INCLUDE: *Happy Birthday Sunita* (Rifco/Watford Palace); *Mr Swallow – The Musical* (The Invisible Dot); *Candida* (Theatre Royal Bath), *Jumpers for Goalposts* (Paines Plough/UK Tour); *The Acid Test* and *The Empire* (Royal Court).

Nick is Head of Sound at the Lyric Hammersmith.

RICHARD PINNER (Illusions)

FOR THE LYRIC: *Cinderella*

OTHER THEATRE CREDITS INCLUDE: *The Lion*, *The Witch and The Wardrobe* (Rose Theatre Kingston); *Regeneration* (Royal and Derngate); *The Cherry Orchard* (Young Vic); *Cinderella* (Northern Ballet); *How the Whale Became* (Royal Opera House); *Barnum* (Chichester Festival Theatre) and *Titus Andronicus* (RSC).

TELEVISION AND FILM CREDITS INCLUDE: *The Greatest Magic Tricks in the Universe Ever*, *Monkey Magic*, *The Quick Trick Show* and *Miranda*.

DAN JACKSON (Musical Director)

MUSICAL DIRECTOR CREDITS INCLUDE: *Wicked* (UK Tour); *Top Hat* (Aldwych/Cast Album); *The Secret Garden* (Birmingham Rep); *Piaf* (Vaudeville); *Jerry Springer The Opera* (UK Tour); *Chicago* (International Tour); *The Master and Margarita* (Chichester Festival Theatre) and *Burnt by the Sun* (National Theatre).

OTHER CONDUCTING CREDITS INCLUDE: *Guys and Dolls* (Piccadilly); *The Drowsy Chaperone* (Novello); *Marguerite* (Haymarket) and *Bugsy Malone* (Queen's).

Lyric

The Lyric Hammersmith is one of the UK's leading producing theatres. Over its hundred and twenty five year history it has been responsible for creating some of the UK's most adventurous and acclaimed theatrical work. It has also gained a national reputation for its work with and for children and young people. Recent productions include the smash hit *Bugsy Malone*, *Ghost Stories* which transferred to the West End and has toured the world and the Olivier award-winning *Blasted*.



Bugsy Malone



A Streetcar Named Desire



Three Kingdoms



Saved

The Lyric's dual commitment to producing the highest quality contemporary theatre, alongside nurturing the creativity of young people is what makes it unique within the cultural ecology of the UK. It is a local theatre rooted in its community with a national and international reputation for the quality and innovation of its artistic work.

The Lyric recently completed a £20million capital project which is the most significant cultural development to take place in West London for decades. It includes the creation of the Reuben Foundation Wing which houses a wide range of new facilities including dance, recording, film & TV studios, a 54 seat cinema and a digital playspace which will expand the Lyric's work with young people, emerging and professional artists.

For more information, please visit lyric.co.uk

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For the Lyric Hammersmith
Lyric Square, King Street, London, W6 0QL
Tel: 020 8741 6850
enquiries@lyric.co.uk, www.lyric.co.uk

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The Lyric is fully committed to reducing its impact on the environment. We were the first ever cultural venue to be awarded the highest 3 Stars Industry Green rating for our commitment to Green initiatives.

Our major Green successes include: we recycle everything, more than 95% of our lighting is LED, we're mainly powered by wind energy and we saved 495 trees last year. For more information visit www.lyric.co.uk



Currently celebrating its 50th Anniversary Year, the Royal Lyceum Theatre Company is Scotland's leading producing theatre. With a strong reputation for excellence in both classical and contemporary work, The Lyceum is committed to developing Scotland's considerable indigenous talents while presenting the best of international drama. Between September and June the company produces up to eight high quality productions making it one of the largest producing companies in the UK. In recent years, The Lyceum has staged co-productions with Theatre Royal, Bath; The Bush Theatre, London; Nottingham Playhouse Theatre Company; National Theatre of Scotland; Citizens Theatre; Dundee Rep; Liverpool Everyman & Playhouse; Chichester Festival Theatre and the Lyric Hammersmith.



Bondagers



The Caucasian Chalk Circle



The Lieutenant of Inishmore



Pressure

In addition The Lyceum also runs an award-winning, ambitious and acclaimed Creative Learning programme which engages with over 16,000 young people across Scotland annually.

The Royal Lyceum Theatre Edinburgh is a magnificent example of late Victorian architecture in the heart of Edinburgh's west end. With a seating capacity of 658, it is an intimate playhouse. The Company rehearses in its own rooms opposite the theatre, and costumes and sets are designed and built at The Lyceum's workshops in Roseburn.

For more information, please visit lyceum.org.uk

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For the Royal Lyceum Theatre Company Ltd.
Grindlay Street, Edinburgh, EH3 9AX
Tel: 0131 248 4800 Fax: 0131 228 3955
info@lyceum.org.uk, lyceum.org.uk

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Acknowledgements

This adaptation of *Tipping the Velvet* grew out of a close writer-director collaboration, therefore my enormous thanks to Lyndsey Turner for her wisdom, imagination, energy and patience during the process.

We'd both like to thank the following people and organisations who helped with the development of the play:

Becky Hope Palmer, Jay Simpson, Yolanda Kettle, Denise Gough, Faye Marsay, the actors of the Secret Theatre company, Samuel West, Tina Wade, Stuart Wade, Veronique Cotrel, Tony Cownie, Charlotte Knight, Sean Holmes, Peter Holland and all at the Lyric Hammersmith, and Mark Thomson and all at the Lyceum, Edinburgh.

And most of all, our thanks to Sarah Waters, for giving us permission to adapt her wonderful book and being a gracious and supportive presence throughout.

LW, September 2015

A note on the songs in the play:

There are a number of moments in the play which are told in the form of a Music Hall turn, and some of these include songs.

In the original Lyric Hammersmith/Edinburgh Lyceum production we chose to use 20th and 21st century pop songs, arranged in a Music Hall style, instead of using songs from the original Music Hall canon, or writing our own pastiche versions.

The songs used in our production haven't been specified in this text, in order to allow future productions to choose their own artistic approach to the music in the play.

Characters

(in order of appearance)

CHAIRMAN

NANCY

KITTY

MOTHER

ALICE

FATHER

WALTER

MRS DENDY

CHARLIE

MARY

SWEET ALICE

FLORENCE

DIANA

BLAKE

MRS JEX

EVELYN

DICKIE

RALPH

ARCHIE

JOSEPH

ANNIE

JENNY

SUSIE

EMILY

MRS SWINDLES

Other roles to be played by the company
(in order of appearance)

ACTOR 1

ACTOR 2

MALE ACTOR

FEMALE ACTOR

MUSIC HALL BAND

TRAIN GUARD

CHOIR OF VOICE-ARTISTS

FAN / FAN 2 / FAN 3

MEAT PUPPETS

SMITHFIELD BUTCHERS

FIVE VICTORIAN GENTLEMEN

MAN

LADIES OF THE CAVENDISH CLUB

POLICEMAN

CITIZENS OF ST JOHN'S WOOD, MAYFAIR, SOHO, FLEET STREET, BRICK LANE
AND BETHNAL GREEN

LAURENCE

FRANK

FEMALE PUB CUSTOMERS

SOCIALISTS

ACT ONE

A big red velvet curtain across the stage.

Before the house lights dim, the CHAIRMAN saunters out onto the stage. A top-hatted cross between an MC and a ringmaster, he holds a wooden gavel in his hand, which he either strikes against a wooden table or in the air. It makes a loud 'clack' each time.

He looks out into the auditorium, admiring, and catches the audience's eye.

CHAIRMAN: 'Ello. Alright?

Would you look at that, eh? Would you look at that. Did you never see anything so... *elegant*?

(Clack!)

I give you welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith!

1895 they put this up – 'A Palace for the Paying Public' they said – and look at it still standing now. And ain't it truly a palace? Hundred and fifty lanterns you've got hanging up there – Parcans, Fresnels, Beamlights, they've got six Varilite 1000 Tungsten Profiles, don't even need a boy to move 'em. And that air you're breathing, all clean and cool? ACON-1300 Air Handling Unit they call it. Takes in air from outside the building, gives it a little kiss and puffs it out at you lot, so quiet you wouldn't even know it was there. State of the art. Indoor toilets and everything!

Wasn't always like this, you know. Wasn't always a

He pulls a programme for tonight's show out of his back pocket and refers to it.

‘powerhouse of provocative work from Britain and beyond’, you know the sort of thing:

The curtain pulls back to reveal an extract from a European-influenced show: three people wearing suits and wolf-heads mime a slow-motion scene of urban alienation.

’Cause back before that, there was this – remember this?

Two actors are standing interrogating a third actor, seated throughout:

ACTOR 1: What was it, Yates? Scissors? Couple a sharp pins and your old mum’s flit gun?

ACTOR 2: Round the back of the dog track? Down there in the muck?

ACTOR 1: Top deck of the 176?

Long Pinter pause.

Sit down, Yates. Tell us about Penge.

CHAIRMAN: And back before that, there was years and years of this:

Two actors perform a snippet of a scene from a 1930s potboiler:

MALE ACTOR: Daphne, whatever’s the matter?

FEMALE ACTOR: The truth is I’m terribly frightened.

MALE ACTOR: Oh Daphne!

FEMALE ACTOR: Please don’t raise your voice, I can’t bear it.

The actors clear the stage and the CHAIRMAN is left alone.

CHAIRMAN: And back even before that, there was the Music Hall. With me and my gavel, your very own Chairman. And a band of the best quality – say ’ello to the ladies and gentlemen –

The band wave and play a quick sting.

Wouldn’t have seen you lot sitting so quietly, back then, lord no. Reverential hush, phone switched off in your bag – you have turned it off, ain’t you? – if you didn’t like it, lord knows you’d let me know about it. Voted with their feet, their voices, their fists sometimes.

Clack.

Variety! Ain't it truly the spice of life? Always something on the bill for your particular peccadillo, a cornucopia of delights – we've had everything here: clowns and conjurors, jokers and japesters, freaks and frolics, all the marvels of the present age.

A young girl appears. She's about eighteen and distinctly average.

And who's this, then? Music hall's greatest fan. Little Nancy Astley from Whitstable. Sitting in the dark at the Palace of Varieties in Canterbury, drinking in the sights and sounds, can't get enough.

Not much to look at now, I'll grant you, but believe you me, this wilted cabbage leaf, this empty shell, this girl with a pearl *nothing*, is more interesting to us than you can ever imagine. God knows she'll give you something to look at later, a real eyeful. More outrageous than anything she's seen on the stage.

Just watch her now, when the next act comes on – this is the moment when nothing turns to something.

If you've champagne in your glasses, raise them now. If you've beer – well beer's got bubbles, don't it? Ladies and gentlemen, Miss Kitty – (*clack!*) – Butler!

KITTY walks out onto the stage – a young woman, but dressed as a man – a West End swell in top hat and tails. There's a rose in her lapel.

NANCY leans forward, amazed.

Yes, there we go, that's how it starts...

KITTY begins her song. It's sultry, louche and sexy. She is astonishing. NANCY is astonished.

The band continue to play as KITTY takes the rose from her lapel and smells it.

KITTY: Always carry a rose, boys – you never know when you might meet her, the girl who'll steal you heart in exchange for a flower.

And such a lot of pretty girls in the audience tonight. Canterbury's a paradise, right boys?

So many pretty girls and only one rose... Who will it be tonight?
You, perhaps. Or you. Ah, there she is...

KITTY throws the rose to a girl in the audience, then sings another verse of her song.

CHAIRMAN: Well ain't she a marvel? What a charmer. And look at Nancy, eyes out on stalks. Ain't never seen nothing like it, ain't never felt such a tingle. 'Cause what if one day that rose might come to her?

KITTY produces hundreds of roses from her top hat as NANCY watches.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel and we smash straight into the kitchen of Astleys' Oyster House.

MOTHER ladles oyster soup into bowls.

MOTHER: Four plates, not two.

NANCY: What?

MOTHER: Four.

NANCY: You said two.

MOTHER: *Table* two. Come on, Nance, where are you?

NANCY: D'you mind if I go to the Palace tonight?

MOTHER: No love, it's Saturday.

NANCY: It's not that busy.

ALICE: Table of eight just come in. Four full tea, two stewed, two pie.

MOTHER: Pop me two pies in, Nance.

NANCY: Please, mother?

MOTHER: I've said, not tonight.

ALICE: What's not tonight?

MOTHER: She wants to go to the theatre.

ALICE: Again?

NANCY: Why not? It's my money.

MOTHER: Not on a Saturday.

ALICE: Bad enough having to do without you all week. Even when you're here you're not really here.

There's no parsley on these.

NANCY: See, I just get it wrong anyway.

MOTHER: Nance, pies.

NANCY: I'll do all the potatoes, not just my half. All next week.

ALICE: I wanted to go out with Tony last Saturday and they wouldn't let me: don't see why it's any different for you, so you can go all the way to Canterbury just for a look at a girl in trousers.

FATHER comes in from the restaurant.

FATHER: Lemons, Mother! We're out of lemons, and the customers are baying for 'em like hounds!

NANCY: Can I go to the Palace tonight?

MOTHER: Don't be asking him because I've said no.

NANCY: Please, Dad?

FATHER: Didn't you go last night?

MOTHER: And the night before.

NANCY: I'll leave at the interval. I can help with clear-up.

FATHER: What's wrong with the second half?

NANCY: It hasn't got Kitty Butler in it.

FATHER: Kitty Butler? The gal what dresses up as a feller?

NANCY: She's the best act they've ever had.

ALICE: Hoping to catch the rose, ain't she?

FATHER: Rose?

ALICE: Kitty Butler does this thing at the end of the act where she throws a rose to a girl in the audience and they all go all spoony about it, it's stupid.

NANCY: No it's not. If I sit in the same seat every night, stands to reason maybe one day she'll have to throw it to me. What if I'm not there the night it happens?

ALICE: It's not right, though, is it? That's a girl.

NANCY: (*To ALICE.*) I'll clean the fish kettles for you. I'll bring the ice in for a month.

Please? If I can't go tonight I'll *die*.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel.

CHAIRMAN: Well, who could resist a plea like that, ladies and gentlemen?

KITTY returns to the stage, singing another verse of her song.

She ends by throwing the rose, and this time we see NANCY catch it. She looks at the rose, and finds a message attached to it with string.

CHAIRMAN: And what's this, then? A message summoning her to a certain dressing room – can you imagine? An invitation from the gods! But what's heaven like when you get there?

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel and we're in KITTY's dressing room.

KITTY: You're here every night.

NANCY: Yes.

KITTY: I asked the boy on the door: 'Who's that girl?' I thought it must be the acrobats in the second half you came to see, the ones with the tight trousers – but I'm told you leave as soon as I've finished.

NANCY: Yes.

KITTY: Why is that?

NANCY: I just. I really like your act.

KITTY: You don't mind if I smoke?

KITTY lights a cigarette. She offers one to NANCY, who shakes her head.

What d'you like so much, in the act?

NANCY: Your costumes.

KITTY: Yes?

NANCY: The way you, um – your songs, the way you sing I mean.

Your hair.

I've never seen a girl with hair as short as yours.

Your songs.

KITTY: Yes, you said.

NANCY: Yes.

KITTY: Well there we are.

KITTY sits down at the dressing table, unties her necktie and lets it hang around her neck.

You've a wonderful complexion. It's like porcelain.

NANCY: It's the steam.

KITTY: Steam?

NANCY: From all the cooking pots. The kitchen's so full of steam we're all bleached as white as cuttlefish.

We've an oyster house. In Whitstable.

KITTY: An oyster-girl!

NANCY: Mother cooks them, I clean and open all the oysters, Alice serves the customers.

KITTY: Alice?

NANCY: My sister.

KITTY: Is your sister as pretty as you?

NANCY: Oh much prettier. She's the pretty one.

We get through that many oysters, you can see the shells all piled up outside, all the way down to the beach, oyster shells instead of sand.

KITTY laughs. She is struggling to undo one of her cufflinks.

KITTY: How. Marvellous.

NANCY: Help you with that?

KITTY: Oh. Thank you.

The management's too tight to give us a dresser so I've to do everything myself.

Keep me from getting too grand, won't it, if I have to fasten my own frock?

Thank you for coming to see me Miss Astley. That's my curiosity satisfied.

I should change.

NANCY: Oh. Yes.

Sorry.

NANCY goes to leave. KITTY holds out her hand and NANCY gives hers.

KITTY bends to kiss NANCY's hand. Just as KITTY's lips are close to it, NANCY flinches and tries to pull her hand away.

Oh

KITTY: What

NANCY: No I

KITTY: You smell like

NANCY: Like a herring.

KITTY: Not a herring. Perhaps, maybe, like a mermaid.

Goodbye, Miss Mermaid. May we meet again.

KITTY releases NANCY's hand.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel and the scene goes into suspension.

CHAIRMAN: Bit of a problem here now, 'cause our Nancy knows as soon as she's out the door, she's out the door – just a funny story, the girl who smelt of fish.

If she don't do something quick, heaven's closing for business.

NANCY: I could be your dresser. I could help you.

Clack.

CHAIRMAN: Good work, Nancy girl.

Sorry, I'm assuming you don't need to see the moment when Kitty says yes, I mean that's sort of a given, ain't it? 'Mum, Dad, I've got a new evening job. I'll be down the theatre every night, cause Kitty Butler – get this – Kitty Butler *needs* me'.

KITTY stands in the dressing room with her jacket on, on another day.

KITTY: So I'll dash back in after my first song, while the talking dogs go on, then we need to get me out of this jacket and into that one hanging there, the blue one, yes?

NANCY takes the blue jacket from the hanger.

So I'll shrug this one off...

KITTY lets the jacket fall to the floor. NANCY bends to pick it up.

...and maybe do that once I've gone, so help me into the new one first?

NANCY helps KITTY into the new jacket.

And the cane – don't let me forget, I went on without it once I felt quite naked.

NANCY hands her the cane.

Wonderful. But twice as fast. My own dresser!

KITTY goes out. NANCY carefully hangs up the jacket.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel.

CHAIRMAN: Well that ain't too difficult, is it? That jacket's still warm.
Next day!

NANCY stands holding out the jacket as KITTY comes in, shrugs off the jacket she's wearing and puts the new one on.

KITTY: They're a rowdy lot tonight, my goodness.

NANCY: Yes, Miss Butler?

KITTY: Miss Butler! You should call me Kitty now you've seen me in my underthings.

NANCY: Kitty.

KITTY: What shall I call you?

NANCY: Whatever you like.

KITTY: What do they call you at home?

NANCY: Nance.

KITTY: I'll call you Nan.

KITTY goes out. NANCY picks up the discarded jacket, looks at it and lifts it to her cheek.

KITTY dashes back in.

Cane!

NANCY hands KITTY her cane and KITTY goes out. NANCY hangs up the jacket.

CHAIRMAN: And look how smooth they get it, just like a dance – let's have some music for this one, boys and girls.

The band strike up to underscore the scene. NANCY stands ready with the jacket in her hands and the cane ready to hand over. KITTY comes in, shrugs off her jacket and NANCY helps her into the new one.

NANCY then hands KITTY the cane. KITTY blows NANCY a kiss and goes out.

NANCY waits till she's gone, then holds the jacket up to her cheek, inhaling KITTY's smell.

She starts to hang up the jacket, stroking it some more as she does so.

She dances around the room with the jacket, as if KITTY was wearing it.

The dance ends as KITTY comes back into the dressing room, on another day.

KITTY: Lord, Nan, what a crowd! They wouldn't let me leave, they *bellowed* for me to sing 'Drink Up, Boys' again. Thank god it's Saturday, I'm exhausted.

Are you alright?

NANCY: Yes.

KITTY: Seem a little quiet tonight.

NANCY: Oh?

Before NANCY can reply there's a knock, and a man appears at the doorway. He's fashionably and a little flamboyantly dressed.

He raises his silk hat and bows to KITTY.

WALTER: Miss Butler? Walter Bliss, ma'am. May I say your performance tonight was mesmerising?

KITTY: Thank you.

WALTER: Thank *you*. Do you know, were it not for the sweetness of your singing voice, I might have thought you really a boy.

You are the best thing on the bill by far. The other acts I'm afraid are unremittingly second-rate – sorry if they're friends of yours

KITTY: Not really.

WALTER: Competent amateurs at best. Only fit for a tone-deaf audience of petty provincials.

WALTER notices NANCY and bows.

Walter Bliss.

KITTY: Miss Astley, my dresser.

WALTER: Thank heavens for you, Miss Butler. How much must the management be paying to keep you here!

KITTY: Not a great deal, as it happens.

WALTER: I do apologise – my card.

He hands KITTY a card from his pocket, which she reads with surprise. He glances at NANCY.

I wonder if I might speak to you a moment? Privately.

KITTY: Yes, um – thank you, Nancy, I'll see you on Monday.

NANCY: Can you come for tea tomorrow?

KITTY: I'm sorry?

NANCY: No, it

KITTY: No, say.

NANCY: Sorry. Um. My parents want me to ask you to come for tea tomorrow.

KITTY: Oh?

NANCY: I told them you won't be able to but they said you can't come this near Whitstable and not have a proper oyster-tea so I promised I'd ask but it doesn't matter.

KITTY: Astley's Oysters are the best in Kent.

WALTER: Are they now?

KITTY: So I'm told. Tell them I'll be delighted.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel.

CHAIRMAN: Tomorrow! Well don't it near drive our Nan mad that night, the thought that only tomorrow, that Kitty, that voice, those arms, the short hair at the nape of her neck – that all this wonderful collection of things... Lord, tomorrow can't come fast enough.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel and makes it tomorrow.

Ladies and Gentlemen, a cosy domestic scene to warm your cockles – and your clams and your whelks while we're at it – we present to you Miss Nancy Astley in A Fish Out of Water.

The Astleys sit around a table, with KITTY in the centre. The family are tucking into oysters from a small barrel on the table. KITTY holds an oyster in her hand, but doesn't yet eat it.

FATHER: And is it true that Archie and Tiny Twink are actually husband and wife?

KITTY: Absolutely true. And she's not the sweet little thing she plays in their act, either.

FATHER: How so?

KITTY: Oh I mustn't, I'm being indiscreet.

MOTHER: Do you know Bessie Bellwood?

ALICE: Mother.

MOTHER: What?

ALICE: Questions. Honestly.

KITTY: I don't mind. I know a ballerina who used to dance on the same bill as Bessie, we visited her dressing room on tour in Brighton. She's very generous with the champagne.

MOTHER: Champagne! Imagine.

FATHER: Drinking champagne with Bessie Bellwood.

MOTHER: What was she wearing?

KITTY: She had a frock that was all sequins, thousands and thousands. When she stepped onto the stage she was like a diamond.

MOTHER: A diamond, Alice!

NANCY: Let Kitty eat her oyster.

KITTY brings her oyster knife together with the oyster rather ineffectually.

FATHER: Beg your pardon, Miss Butler – where's our manners? Alice, show the lady how, or she'll jab herself and get a nasty cut.

NANCY: I'll do it.

NANCY moves next to KITTY. She takes the oyster and the knife from her, and KITTY leans in.

You hold it in your palm, flat shell upwards like this. Then you take the blade and you don't put it between the halves, you put it in the hinge, here. Then you grasp it, and you *prise*.

NANCY gives a gentle, expert twist and the shell eases open.

Then you hold it steady 'cause the shell's full of liquor, that's the tastiest part. All the oceans of the world in one little shell.

Then you trim away this bit – the beard.

KITTY: A beard. Are they all boys, then, oysters?

FATHER: You'll find, Miss Butler, that your oyster is a queer creature – now a he, now a she – a regular *morphodite*.

ALICE: Just like you.

KITTY: I've never been likened to a mollusc before.

MOTHER: In this house, Miss Butler, it's something of a compliment.

NANCY: Now you eat it.

KITTY lifts the oyster to her lips, meeting NANCY's eyes as she does so.

FATHER: Don't bolt him down whole, now, Miss Butler, like the *gourmays* do. You give him a real good chew.

KITTY throws the contents of the shell into her mouth, chews hard and fast and swallows.

The others wait on tenterhooks for her reaction.

KITTY: Delicious!

MOTHER: I'll get some tea on.

MOTHER stands and goes to the kitchen. FATHER follows her, picking up the oyster barrel.

FATHER: Think we might need some more, then.

KITTY: You know, Alice, Nan talks about you all the time. She's so proud of you.

ALICE: You call her Nan, do you?

NANCY: I like it.

ALICE picks up an empty dish and follows her parents out, leaving NANCY and KITTY alone.

KITTY: Do they like me, do you think?

NANCY: Oh yes. Very much. Does our house smell of fish?

KITTY laughs.

KITTY: Listen, before they come back: I've a piece of news. Remember the gentleman that called last night, Mr Bliss? He's a manager. *Theatrical artistes.* He's offered me a contract at a music hall in London.

NANCY: London.

KITTY: He can put me on bills with all the big names – Nelly Power, Jenny Hill – he's got contacts in all the halls –

NANCY: So you're going – you are going

KITTY: Of course. *London*, Nan.

NANCY: When?

KITTY: As soon as I can get my trunk packed.

But I want

ALICE comes back in and collects some plates.

Can I help you, Alice?

ALICE: No, s'alright.

ALICE goes out again.

KITTY: I want you to come with me.

NANCY: Me?

KITTY: Yes.

NANCY: To London?

KITTY: Yes.

I'll need my dresser, won't I? Mr Bliss says there'd not be much money for you at first, but you'd share my digs, so

I mean if you'd rather not, of course I

NANCY: I'd love to.

KITTY: Will your parents let you go?

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel.

CHAIRMAN: Don't think they've got much choice in the matter, have they?

A choir of voice-artists assemble, with recital folders in hand.

Ladies and Gentlemen, something a little different for you now, our next act on tonight's bill. Close your eyes if you dare, as we invite you to join Miss Nan Astley and Miss Kitty Butler in a feast for one of the senses: an acoustical journey from small town to Big Smoke.

NANCY, MOTHER and FATHER, and KITTY are also in the voice group, as if on the train platform, speaking at normal tempo at first:

MOTHER: Have you got your scarf?

FATHER: Let us know you're safe.

NANCY: Course I will.

KITTY: Here's the train!

MOTHER and FATHER repeat their lines of dialogue to mimic the rhythm of the train coming into the station, fast at first (with overlaps) then slowing to a stop:

MOTHER/FATHER: Help you with your / case

Don't forget to / write

Have you got your / scarf?

Let us know you're / safe
Careful on the / roads
Have you got your / shoes?
Don't forget to / eat
You're my little / girl
Help you with your case
Don't forget to write
Have you got your scarf?
Let us know you're safe
Careful on the roads
Have you got your shoes?
Don't forget to eat
You're my little girl

VOICES: Shh

The voices underscore with train noises during the next bit of normal-tempo dialogue:

FATHER: Get on get on!

NANCY: Good bye! Love you!

TRAIN GUARD: Right away! (*Blows whistle.*)

MOTHER: Don't forget to write!

VOICES: Chuf chuf chuf chuf chuf chuf chuf chuf

*NANCY and KITTY's voices now mimic the rhythm of the train moving away.
Other voices in the train carriage mingle with theirs:*

KITTY: How do you feel?

NANCY: How do I feel?

KITTY: Leaving your home

Leaving your town

VOICE: (*guard*) Tickets please.

KITTY: Out of your life

Off in the world

VOICE: (*vendor*) Tea and coffee! Tea and coffee!

NANCY: How do I feel?

VOICE: (*child*) Muuuuuuuumm, I need a weeeeeeeee.

NANCY: Free as a bird

Free as the wind

Raring to go

When do I start?

VOICE: (*vendor*) Teas and coffees! Overpriced snacks!

KITTY: This is my dream

Isn't it grand?

Going to Lon / don

NANCY: Isn't it bright

Going to Lon / don

KITTY: Isn't it un / believable!

VOICE: (*vendor*) Monkey nuts! Shoe polish!

NANCY: Going to London!

KITTY: Off in the world!

Isn't it *mesmerising*?

NANCY: Going to London!

VOICE: (*guard*) Charing Cross! All change please! Charing Cross!

The voices start a background clamour as WALTER finds KITTY and NANCY.

WALTER: Miss Butler! Welcome! Let me take that for you. Miss Astley!
Here you both are. You've brought the weather with you, haven't
you? I'll escort you to your lodgings. I thought we'd take the scenic
route.

*The steady clip-clop of a horse and carriage starts up (hooves and some chain-
rattling / bridle noise).*

NANCY: So loud so bright

So big so tall

KITTY: So tall so busy

So loud so bright

A busker is heard, singing a song about London.

KITTY: Look Nan – Big Ben

NANCY: Big Ben! St Paul's!

The palace, the flag

The Queen's at home

WALTER: We'll go through the West End we'll see all the theatres

Her Majesty's, The Haymarket,

Criterion, Pavilion

VOICE: *(singer) Champagne Charlie is my name, Champagne Charlie is my
name*

WALTER: And Leicester Square – the Empire there

And stop the coach!

The carriage sounds stop.

The *Alhambra*.

KITTY: The *Alhambra*, Nan!

WALTER: Onward!

The carriage sounds start up again.

VOICE: (*vendor*) Eeen Stanna!

NANCY: That man down there – he's lost a leg

And all the dirt

KITTY: Trafalgar Square!

So loud so bright

So big so tall

NANCY: So tall so busy

So loud so bright

VOICE: (*vendor*) Oranges oranges big juicy oranges

CHAIRMAN: We'll cross the Thames to Brixton now

VOICE: (*man*) Blimey Charlie!

NANCY: So grey such dirt

And all the kids

KITTY: And all the kids

So lean so scruffy

VOICE: (*urchin*) Fack off that's my best suit!

WALTER: And here's the street, Ginevra Road

The place you'll call a home from home

MRS DENDY: My dears! You're here!

The carriage noises stop.

CHAIRMAN: And Mrs Dendy. From Mrs Dendy's Famous Theatrical Boarding House.

Clack!

MRS DENDY has shown KITTY, NANCY and WALTER into an attic bedroom.

NANCY: There's only one bed.

KITTY: We're to share, Nan. Just for now, till the act takes off.

WALTER: Did you know, Miss Astley, you're in the presence of London's best-loved theatrical landlady?

MRS DENDY: Oh Mr Bliss, such a flirt.

We've all sorts staying here: two ballerinas, a clown, Mr Membrane who's a psychic though it's all mirrors really, he's basically a pickpocket.

KITTY: It's perfect, Mrs Dendy. We'll be ever so cosy, won't we Nan?

MRS DENDY: Come down and meet the others, we'll have some tea.

MRS DENDY and WALTER head out. KITTY goes to follow, but turns back.

KITTY: You don't mind the bed, do you?

NANCY: Um no, it

KITTY: Haven't you shared with Alice your whole life?

NANCY: Yes, just not with

KITTY: I'm not quite a stranger, am I? I don't snore. I promise I won't ravish you.

I never had a sister. Someone to whisper secrets to – won't it be fun?

MRS DENDY pops her head around the door.

MRS DENDY: Got everything you need, deary?

NANCY: Thank you, yes.

MRS DENDY: There's a bit of cold meat for dinner downstairs if you want it. Do you like tongue, Miss Astley?

Clack!

CHAIRMAN: I think we know the answer to that, ladies and gents, don't we?

Oh imagine: lying in bed with the girl of your dreams, so close you could touch her. The things she used to think about back in Whitstable, the fevered nights – and now this! What if you touch her,

half-awake? What if your hand goes somewhere it shouldn't? Oh imagine how little sleep!

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel and NANCY and KITTY are in KITTY's new dressing room at the Star Music Hall, Bermondsey, KITTY flushed from performing:

KITTY: Bastards! All of them. Just bastards.

NANCY: How was the show?

KITTY: I am *dripping* with sweat. They're impossible to please. I strut and pose, I dance till I'm sore, I sing myself hoarse and all they give is a light ripple.

They used to *roar* for me in Kent. There was a woman in the fourth row tonight darning a sock.

WALTER comes in, carrying a large box which he sets down.

WALTER: Miss Butler, you were marvellous tonight.

KITTY: They barely looked up from their beer.

WALTER: Well, they're a difficult crowd, and you're still adjusting to a larger theatre. Once the orchestra gets a hold of the pacing of your strolls – I shall speak to Mr Slater again, don't worry –

KITTY: They used to roar for me in Kent.

A young boy, CHARLIE, comes in, holding a pile of envelopes. He hands one to WALTER.

CHARLIE: Box office receipts, Mr Bliss.

KITTY: Any post for me, Charlie?

CHARLIE: No, Miss Butler.

WALTER: You'll be inundated soon, I know it.

CHARLIE: Alright, Nancy?

WALTER: In the meantime....

WALTER hands the big box to KITTY.

KITTY: What is it?

She starts to open it.

WALTER opens the envelope.

WALTER: This is for last night, is it?

CHARLIE: For the week. Oh, and Mr Kepple says can he have a word?
'Tween you and me, he's shaking up the bill. The mouse orchestra's got the chop. And the hypnotist.

KITTY: Oh, look!

NANCY: What is it?

KITTY: It's a – is it a costume?

WALTER: A gift. But yes, a costume.

NANCY: Oh, that's handsome.

KITTY pulls out a red soldier's jacket and hat.

KITTY: Look at this.

WALTER: Something rather fine about a soldier, isn't there?

CHARLIE: Yeah, top hat and tails is all a bit last week.

KITTY: Sorry?

CHARLIE: Nobody's doing Burlington Bertie anymore, are they?

WALTER: Yes, thank you Charlie. Tell Mr Kepple I'll be in to see him later.

CHARLIE leaves.

I do hope it fits, I fancied I had a good enough idea of your size from watching the act so many times.

KITTY: Do me the honour of speaking frankly, Mr Bliss.

WALTER: No, alright.

Your arrival has not been as resounding a success as we might have hoped. They're fickle, Londoners. Let you know if they've seen

something before.

NANCY: You mean they've seen other acts like Kitty?

WALTER: There's been a craze for girls in trousers, yes. The West End swell may have had his day. I've been looking round the other halls, and it's all *characters* now. There's a girl in a sailor suit at Collins's, a policeman at the Empire and sundry other lordlings and pantomime princes elsewhere, doing very good business. *But* – none of them has a soldier. Yet.

KITTY: I haven't got a soldier song.

WALTER: We'll get you one – we can adjust the lyrics to 'Drink up, boys', in the meantime. 'Drink up, Captain' or somesuch.

We are on a short contract here, Miss Butler. If the management chooses not to renew...

KITTY: Right, I see.

WALTER: There, the second house is about to begin. I'll see you after the show. Don't despair, Miss Butler. We can always go back to the regions.

WALTER leaves.

NANCY: Try it on, then?

KITTY: Now?

NANCY: There's five minutes before you're back on. It might need altering.

KITTY shrugs off her jacket and pulls on the soldier's.

KITTY: It's your livelihood too, if the act doesn't work, isn't it?

NANCY: Bit wide at the shoulders. They've done a nice job on the piping, though. The buttons are good.

KITTY: You were talking in your sleep last night.

NANCY: What was I saying?

KITTY: More murmuring really, I couldn't hear the words. I thought I heard my name, were you dreaming about the act?

NANCY: I must have been.

I'll have to take it in a bit at the waist.

KITTY: Was I a success in the dream?

NANCY: I can't remember. I mean yes. I.

I'll just put some pins in.

Do I often talk in my sleep?

KITTY: Sometimes. Did your sister never tell you?

NANCY: She didn't.

KITTY: So she didn't tell you that you reach for her in the night?

NANCY: Stay still a moment.

KITTY: I wake up sometimes with your arm draped right across me, your breath on the back of my neck.

But then I imagine you and Alice must have slept quite entangled in each other, those cold winter nights by the seaside.

You mustn't worry, it doesn't keep me awake.

NANCY has her hands on KITTY's waist. KITTY laughs.

'Kitty...'

NANCY laughs.

NANCY: I must have been dreaming of the act.

CHARLIE comes to the door.

CHARLIE: Two minutes, Miss Butler.

KITTY: Thanks Charlie.

CHARLIE: Two minutes, Nancy?

CHARLIE winks at NANCY, then goes.

NANCY helps KITTY out of the jacket and into her usual costume.

KITTY: Better get out there. Hundreds of people waiting to go back to sleep...

KITTY goes out the door. NANCY picks up the red soldier jacket.

NANCY: Didn't pin the shoulders.

She takes some pins and tries to guess where they should go on the jacket, then has an idea. She puts the jacket on then looks in the mirror to place a pin in the shoulder.

She catches sight of herself wearing the jacket, and steps back from the mirror.

CHAIRMAN: Well what about that, then? Don't that look proper interesting?

NANCY giggles at her reflection. She goes to the costume box and pulls out the soldier's hat and places it on her head then runs back to the mirror to take a look.

Think our Nancy's seen something she rather likes.

NANCY turns from side to side, looking at herself. She pushes her hair up into the hat.

Look at that.

She goes back to the costume box and pulls out a military baton and an envelope.

She extracts a false moustache from the envelope and places it on her top lip. She tries out a male voice.

NANCY: Hello.

CHAIRMAN: Lower.

NANCY: Hello.

CHAIRMAN: Now ain't that something.

NANCY tucks the baton under her arm and marches a little back and forth.

NANCY: Hello hello hello hello

Still pacing, NANCY doesn't notice as WALTER comes into the room.

WALTER: Miss Astley, will you remind Miss Butler that I

WALTER stops short. NANCY freezes.

My god

NANCY: Oh Mr Bliss I was just

WALTER: Turn around. Slowly.

NANCY: I'm sorry, I promise I've never before

WALTER: Don't say anything.

Yes.

This, Miss Astley, *this* will make us all very rich.

Clack!

CHAIRMAN: Well what do you think he's got in mind? Yes, you've got it.

What shall we call it, ladies and gentlemen? A dramatic entertainment to shock and delight, how about Miss Nan Astley and the Baptism of Fire?

NANCY and KITTY come on, dressed in matching soldier suits. They parade around, arm in arm, and dance a few steps, KITTY showing NANCY what to do and counting the beats.

NANCY stops after a moment.

NANCY: No, I can't do it, I feel like a right 'nana.

KITTY: Trouble is, Arthur, you look scared.

NANCY: I *am* scared.

KITTY: Why?

NANCY: What if I get laughed at? Or slapped.

KITTY: They're not going to slap you, not if you do it right.

NANCY pauses, drops out of character.

NANCY: Sorry, what's the line?

WALTER: 'Take charge'

NANCY: Take charge.

WALTER: 'Tell them what I want'

NANCY: Take charge, tell them what I want. Sorry, Kitty.

KITTY: It's fine, you've got it.

NANCY: Just trying to remember the words *and* the steps.

KITTY: Let's just go back over the steps for now. I slap you on the back here, then walk walk stop salute

NANCY: Walk walk

KITTY: Stop salute, then walk walk wink, yes? Tip our hats to the girls, then we're here for the words, alright?

NANCY: Can I just run it through a couple of times?

WALTER: Whatever you need, Miss Astley.

KITTY: Name! We were going to talk about

WALTER: Yes. We can take the oyster girl out of Whitstable, but we can't take the oyster girl out of 'Nancy Astley'.

NANCY marks out the steps by herself while KITTY and WALTER look at a piece of paper he takes from his pocket.

KITTY: I call her Nan.

WALTER: Well that's a start.

KITTY: Nan Love, I like that.

WALTER: Perhaps a little sentimental.

KITTY: Nan Sergeant. Nan Scarlet.

WALTER: Nan Silver, I quite liked.

KITTY: Nan *Gold*.

WALTER: Hmm...

KITTY: Nan King!

WALTER: That's it! Brilliant. Kitty Butler and Nan King.

CHARLIE comes in with an envelope.

CHARLIE: This just come, Mr Bliss.

WALTER: Aha! The new script, ladies.

WALTER tears open the envelope and scan-reads several pages.

CHARLIE: Don't see any ladies in here. *(To NANCY.)* Nice kecks, by the way.

WALTER: Yes – yes – splendid – yes, splendid. Yes, this will do very well.

CHARLIE goes. WALTER hands a copy to NANCY and another to KITTY.

Let's run through it right now, it's mainly the last page that's different.

NANCY flicks to the last page and reads it.

Shall we take it from the top?

KITTY: Yes, lovely.

What's up with you, Arthur? Face like a weekend in Margate.

Nan?

NANCY: Sorry I've just – seen this last bit – are we really doing that?

KITTY looks at the page.

WALTER: The last version just fizzled out, it needs more of a button, something to really knock their socks off.

NANCY: But this says we

KITTY: Oh yes. Yes, I see. Oh that's good.

WALTER: Shall we? Shall we try just that page?

NANCY: I'm sorry, I

WALTER: Yes?

NANCY: Is this a good idea?

WALTER: If we get it right it'll be a sensation, believe me.

NANCY: I'm not sure I can do this.

KITTY: Is it getting new lines when you've learned the others?

WALTER: You know, of course, that we can't throw over the idea of the double act, now that we've hit upon it. If you don't wish to partner Kitty, there'll be some other girl who does.

NANCY: Another girl?

WALTER: This is the theatre, my dear. There's always another girl.

KITTY: No no – no no. Nan, we'll be fine – Walter's right, the scene needs an ending. Just think of it like a full stop, but it's hardly at all different, the lines. I know it's scary, your first performance, but I'll be there to help you through it. Yes?

NANCY: Yes.

WALTER: Do we still have an act?

KITTY: Yes. Yes, we do.

WALTER: Good. Let's talk about your hair.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel and NANCY is suddenly on stage, KITTY beside her.

CHAIRMAN: Ladies and Gentlemen, making their debut performance at the Bermondsey Star, two for the price of one – and who doesn't love a bargain – Kitty Butler and Nan King!

NANCY raises her hat to reveal a new, short haircut underneath.

They do a few military turns, salutes etc, underscored by the band, but KITTY notices that NANCY is a beat behind, dragging her feet somewhat.

KITTY: What's up with you, Arthur? Face like a weekend in Margate.

NANCY: Don't know what to do, Albert. When I signed up they said all the girls love a boy in uniform, but I don't have no luck with them, however hard I try.

KITTY: Oh Arthur. Is it that bad?

NANCY: Pining, I am. Pining.

Can you help me? You always seem to get the girls.

KITTY: Well alright. You meet a nice young lady at a party, looks like she might be up for a bit of sport, what d'you say to her?

NANCY: I say 'What a pleasant day it is', or something.

KITTY: 'What a pleasant day it is!'

NANCY: Or if it's raining, 'Well at least it's good for the lawns'.

KITTY: And how far does that get you, Arthur?

NANCY: Not very, as it happens.

KITTY: Thing is, Arthur, your modern girl's not got time to talk about the weather. You need to let her know right upfront that your intentions are far from honourable.

NANCY: So what should I say? 'Hello, I think you're beautiful.'

KITTY: Whoa whoa whoa keep a bit back! Heart on your sleeve much?

NANCY: Well tell me then. How do you do it?

KITTY sings a song instructing NANCY in how to flirt with women.

KITTY does a little dance coming out of the song. NANCY watches.

NANCY: Blimey – you say all that and they don't give you a clip round the ear?

KITTY: Thing about girls is, they like you to be straight with them.

NANCY: Straight?

KITTY: Tell them what you want.

NANCY: Is that right?

KITTY: You come on all talk-about-the-weather, she thinks you're just marking time till someone else shows up.

They like it when you *take charge*.

Go on – you have a go.

NANCY tries the song, but is much less assured than KITTY when performing it. She gives up part-way through.

NANCY: No, I can't do it, I feel like a right 'nana.

KITTY: Trouble is, Arthur, you look scared.

NANCY: I *am* scared.

KITTY: Why?

NANCY: What if I get laughed at? Or slapped.

KITTY: They're not going to slap you, not if you do it right.

NANCY: Take charge.

KITTY: You can do it.

NANCY: Tell them what I want.

KITTY: Don't just tell them, show them.

Here, imagine I'm a girl, try it on me.

NANCY: Show you what I want. You sure?

KITTY: Go on.

And Arthur?

NANCY: Yeah?

KITTY: Don't forget: you're a catch.

NANCY sings and dances with more confidence this time, her performance pointed towards KITTY.

At the end of the song, NANCY grabs KITTY, bends her back and kisses her full on the mouth.

The kiss goes on for ages, time standing still.

Eventually the CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel.

CHAIRMAN: And listen! That sound, that starts like the patter of rain on the rooftop and turns into torrents of the most wonderful drug in the world: *applause*.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel and we're back in the dressing room. During the scene NANCY and KITTY change their costumes for the next version of the

song.

NANCY: That was amazing. That was incredible!

KITTY: We did it!

NANCY: They liked it, didn't they? They liked us.

My god, when we first walked out I felt frozen to the spot but then when they started to cheer I felt this feeling, this *rush*

KITTY: You liked it, did you?

NANCY: The

KITTY: Doing the show.

NANCY: I wanted to go back on straight away, and do it all again.

KITTY: And you were alright, were you, with the new bit?

NANCY: Which

KITTY: The new ending.

NANCY: Oh. Yes. You? I think it worked.

KITTY: Yes. I mean, strange

NANCY: Strange for us, yes

WALTER comes in.

WALTER: *What* a show! They've never seen anything like it. I can only pity the act going on after you.

NANCY: I feel like I'm glowing – am I glowing?

WALTER presents NANCY with a bottle of champagne, bowing.

WALTER: Courtesy of the Manager. Our gamble has well and truly paid off.

NANCY takes the bottle and starts to open it.

Thank you, Miss Butler, for trusting me.

WALTER takes KITTY's hand in both of his, then bows and kisses it for slightly longer than necessary.

KITTY: Nan did everything, really.

NANCY: I can't do this, I'm too excited.

WALTER takes the bottle back and opens it.

MRS DENDY comes in.

MRS DENDY: Oh girls! I just saw a lady on the front steps turn to her husband and say 'why don't you ever kiss me like that?' Ain't that marvellous?

WALTER: A toast! To your most brilliant debut. And many more nights to follow.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel and we're back on stage. NANCY and KITTY sing another verse of their song, in different costumes. They are more confident than before, really enjoying the performance.

And then we're back in the dressing room again:

WALTER is perched on the edge of the dressing table, reading from a newspaper.

KITTY is listening, and NANCY and CHARLIE are opening a large pile of telegrams. They all have a glass of champagne in their hand or close by.

WALTER: 'I consider Miss Butler and Miss King to be two of the most charming ladies – or should I say *gentlemen* – to grace the London stage in many a year.' The Times of London, no less!

NANCY: 'Congratulations on your triumph' – I don't know who half these people are, Kitty.

CHARLIE: 'Hats off to you – perhaps I should get myself a little friend. B. Bellwood'

KITTY: Bessie Bellwood? Oh my god.

NANCY: 'May I take you two lovely boys to tea? – Lady Beeching'

WALTER: 'Titillating but never coarse, the act ends with a thrillingly risqué moment that whipped the audience into a near-frenzy.'

CHARLIE: Yeah, whose idea was the smooch? That's what's pulling them in, ain't it? Crowd of people at stage door, six girls deep. Boys in the front row all taking notes.

NANCY: Dimwits – it's not real, is it?

CHARLIE: Looks real.

NANCY: *Acting*, Charlie.

WALTER: 'The rather tired male-impersonator genre has been revived by these two merry young lads, exquisitely costumed and with a naughty twinkle in their eye...'

KITTY: Wonderful.

CHARLIE: Go on then, show us your naughty twinkle.

CHARLIE tips NANCY's hat off her head and holds it out of her reach. She lunges for it, but he grabs her with his other hand, and she spills a little champagne over her wrist.

NANCY: Oh, *Charlie*.

WALTER: 'The wit of men but the grace of women' – we could put that on the billboards.

CHARLIE: Lick that off for you if you like.

NANCY: You'll do nothing of the sort, cheeky thing.

KITTY: Charlie, will you go and tell them we'll be down just as soon as we've dressed.

WALTER: Yes, we must clear out, Charlie, leave these ladies to make themselves beautiful. Not that there's a great deal of work to be done.

WALTER bows – in KITTY's direction – and leaves the room, CHARLIE following.

KITTY and NANCY start to change their clothes.

NANCY: Where shall we eat? I'm starving.

KITTY: Had a nice flirt, did you?

NANCY: What?

KITTY: You and Charlie. Hands all over each other.

NANCY: Charlie? Don't be ridiculous, what's the matter?

KITTY: Might've thought the stage door boy a little beneath you, but each to their own.

NANCY: You're one to talk about flirting.

KITTY: What?

NANCY: Covered in Walter's dribble half the time, no wonder you need a clean shirt every night.

KITTY slaps NANCY's face.

Oh! Ow. Why'd you do that?

KITTY: Nan

KITTY quickly steps over to NANCY and puts her hands on either side of NAN's face.

NANCY: What

KITTY kisses her fiercely. NANCY's knees buckle.

KITTY: Sorry

NANCY: Kitty

KITTY: Sorry

NANCY goes to KITTY and kisses her. KITTY gasps.

You'll kiss the life out of me.

NANCY: Is this real?

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel.

CHAIRMAN: Oh it's real alright. One of those moments when the universe knits itself together, suddenly rights itself, everything makes sense and you see the world in a single bed and everything everything everything is Kitty Butler and everything everything everything is Nan King.

NANCY and KITTY have sex for the first time, in the form of an acrobatic aerial silks routine. It's beautiful and tender but also taut and urgent. The girls wound up in bedsheets and each others' arms.

It ends with the girls on the bed, bathed in afterglow.

The next morning. KITTY and NANCY are still in bed. KITTY goes to pull the covers back and get up, but NANCY pulls her back.

NANCY: No

KITTY giggles.

Not yet.

KITTY: Walter's coming to pick us up.

NANCY: Not yet he's not.

KITTY relents and they kiss.

KITTY: How are you feeling?

NANCY: Slightly bruised. In a nice way.

KITTY: We drank a lot of champagne last night, didn't we?

NANCY: No no no don't do that

KITTY: Do what?

NANCY: Say it was the champagne

KITTY: It had something to do with it

NANCY: And now, this morning?

You look new-born. To think of all the nights we lay next to each other, when we could have been

KITTY: Yes.

NANCY: Let's never waste another night. Let's never waste another minute.

When I first knew you, I used to think that when I thought of you I was all lit up, like a candle. I was afraid people would notice. I

thought if you knew I liked you as a, as a *sweetheart* – I never heard of that before, did you?

KITTY: It's not a thing to be talked about. Not something you'd tell people.

NANCY: But you knew about it?

KITTY: Just sometimes you see a girl, don't you, and she's *different* so you

NANCY: You mean you've been with a girl before?

KITTY: It doesn't matter, Nan. I never cared for any other girl as much as you.

NANCY: When did you begin to think you might – feel that way about me?

KITTY: I don't know, maybe when you opened the oyster for me at your father's table and I saw you blush as you did it. No, before that. Maybe when I first smelled the oyster-liquor on your fingers.

There – is that saucy enough for you?

NANCY: No, not quite.

NANCY pulls KITTY closer and reaches under her nightgown. KITTY enjoys it for a moment then pushes NANCY's hand away.

KITTY: No we musn't we mustn't

NANCY: But I've spent so long not being allowed to touch you. Now I'm allowed to I don't think I can ever stop.

KITTY: Nan, you will be sensible, won't you? You won't tell anyone, you won't tell Walter?

NANCY: You mean I mustn't kiss you when he's in the carriage with us?

KITTY: I mean it, Nan. We'll have to be careful.

NANCY: I've been careful since the first minute I saw you. I'm the Queen of Careful. I'll go on forever, if you like. As long as I can be a bit reckless when we're alone.

Next time I kiss you, we'll be on the stage with a thousand eyes watching us.

KITTY: Yes.

NANCY: Wouldn't they gasp if they knew what they were paying for?

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel.

CHAIRMAN: Well what a show that would be, eh? And what a thrill to be famous and paid handsomely for the thing you'd more than happily do for nothing. Oh yes, ladies and gentlemen, top of the world and top of the bill, I give you the raciest thing since the Epsom Derby, the act that's tearing up London, Kitty Butler and Nan King!

KITTY and NANCY perform the final verse of their song, this time in even posher costumes (eg both as West End swells, in tailcoats and toppers), and with the confidence of knowing they're stars, and being in love with each other.

And then we're back in the dressing room. A number of young female fans are there, clustered around NANCY and KITTY. NANCY is signing picture postcards for some of them.

FAN: Can you put 'For Elsie' on it?

NANCY: 'Merry Christmas Elsie from your good friend Nan King', there you go.

FAN 2: Have you got a sweetheart, Miss King?

NANCY: No time for that, always working, aren't we Kitty?

KITTY is reading a newspaper article. NANCY is handed another postcard to sign.

FAN 3: My name's Bertha.

KITTY: Did you see this?

NANCY: What is it? Bertha. Very pretty name.

KITTY: We're in the Green Room Gossip column.

NANCY: Ha. What's it say?

KITTY: About us at Kettner's last night.

NANCY hands back the postcard.

FAN 3: I'll keep this by my bed.

FAN: You're very handsome, Miss King.

KITTY stands up. She starts to usher the girls out of the door.

KITTY: Alright. Miss King and I must change our clothes now, if you'll excuse us.

NANCY: Yes, good night all.

FAN 2: We'll be here again tomorrow, row B in the circle.

NANCY: We'll give you a wave.

One of the young women hangs back, then shyly holds out a letter to NANCY. She takes it, and the girl hurries away after the others.

NANCY: Did you hear that girl say she hadn't eaten lunch for a week so she could watch us from the stalls instead of the balcony? All day standing up in a shop without any food, just to be a few yards closer to us.

KITTY: They're cracked, those girls, you mustn't encourage them.

NANCY opens the letter and reads it.

NANCY: 'Dear Miss King – I am in love with you!'

KITTY: You see?

NANCY: They're not cracked, they're – well, they're like us, aren't they?

KITTY: Nan! They're *toms*.

NANCY: Toms? What's a tom?

KITTY: You know. Girls who – who kiss other girls.

NANCY: We kiss each other.

KITTY: We're just – we love each other but we're not – we just happened to fall in love. They, you know, they seek each other out.

NANCY: What's the matter?

KITTY holds out the newspaper she was reading previously. She reads from it.

KITTY: 'Who might we have spied having a cosy supper at a corner table but London's favourite pair of male impersonators....'

NANCY: Yes?

KITTY: 'Misses Butler and King ignored the many other theatre stars enjoying the famous Kettners ambience, and had eyes only for each other as they tucked into an enormous plate of oysters. No doubt their risqué act, which grows more daring by the week, is helped by their exclusive friendship off the stage.'

NANCY: It just says we're friends.

KITTY: Were we holding hands under the table?

NANCY: I can't remember.

KITTY: Dammit.

NANCY: It doesn't matter, it's just a silly paper.

KITTY: After Flossie Nelson was seen kissing her dresser outside the Cafe Royal there wasn't a theatre in all of London who'd let her sweep the floor. She had to marry some dreadful clerk just to keep herself out of the workhouse.

NANCY: I'd go to the workhouse for you, Kitty

KITTY: Don't joke, it isn't funny. We should be more careful than ever now that

Now that we're getting to be well known.

NANCY comes to her, puts her arms around her waist and kisses her neck.

NANCY: Now that we're rich and famous.

KITTY: I mean it.

NANCY: Let's not argue, it's Christmas.

KITTY turns and kisses NANCY lightly. Hearing a noise from the corridor, she springs away.

WALTER: Knock knock.

KITTY: Come in, Walter.

WALTER comes in with an armful of post.

WALTER: Another fabulous performance, ladies. The usual stack of requests and invitations. And this from Yardley – the new scent,

NANCY: Free things!

KITTY: Is it for men or women?

WALTER: I can't imagine anyone wanting to smell like that, but there we go... A request from Lady Broom to attend a reception for her Women's charity.

KITTY: Oof, politics. We're on stage that night, aren't we?

WALTER: I'm sure you could be. The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine would like your thoughts on the new sleeve. And you're invited to the Prince of Wales' party at the Criterion on the 27th.

KITTY: Accept.

NANCY: That's just after Christmas, we'll still be away.

KITTY: Away?

NANCY: Whitstable – we talked about it.

KITTY: I didn't know we'd decided.

NANCY: What else are you going to do? You haven't got a family to go to.

KITTY: Oh, thanks.

WALTER: We're all invited to Christmas Day at Mrs Dendy's. 'Waifs and Strays', she calls it. Always very jolly.

KITTY: We can't disappoint Mrs Dendy, can we?

NANCY: I've got to go home. My family

KITTY: No, of course, but they don't need to see me.

NANCY: You mean – go by myself?

KITTY: Why not?

NANCY: But I'll

I'll miss you.

KITTY laughs, glances at WALTER.

KITTY: You see me every day.

NANCY: No, I know, but

KITTY: Make it a short visit, then. Come back for the party on the 27th.
The Prince of Wales, Nan.

NANCY: Will you miss me?

KITTY: 'Course.

CHAIRMAN: So there she goes, off home to mummy and daddy, a total impostor. Nan King pretending to be Nancy Astley, a role she's got no idea how to play anymore.

You wanted drama, well here you go: the homecoming to end all homecomings, the prodigal returns, what d'you reckon to this, then?

Clack! NANCY, MOTHER, FATHER and ALICE are sitting around the fire.

MOTHER: Auntie Rhoda's got a new feller – Harry Treadwell from the butchers.

ALICE: Cup of tea, Nance?

NANCY: Yes please. Kitty loves tea. I make it on a little stove in the dressing room. She has it with condensed milk in.

ALICE: That's peculiar.

FATHER: Did you get the oysters we sent you?

NANCY: Yes, sorry. It's been so busy – Kitty's a star now, we get so much post.

MOTHER: Oh and Agnes had twins

NANCY: Who's Agnes?

MOTHER: Agnes. Used to play with when you were little

NANCY: I didn't play with anybody called Agnes.

MOTHER: Agnes Cook.

NANCY: I don't know her.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel.

CHAIRMAN: Bloody hell, what's this, Naturalism? Begging your pardons, ladies and gentlemen, this ain't the scene we're looking for. Let's shift it on a bit...

He clacks again and the family shift forward in time slightly.

NANCY: I'm not used to eating so early, that's all. We eat after the show usually

MOTHER: You have your dinner at half past ten?

NANCY: London's like that, you can get a cup of tea and a bun any time of the night

MOTHER: Give yourself indigestion.

Clack.

CHAIRMAN: Bit further.

NANCY: Last Sunday we went skating on the Thames, Kitty's really good at skating

What's that smell?

ALICE: What smell?

Clack.

CHAIRMAN: Hang on.

MOTHER: Matty Elkins got married.

CHAIRMAN: No! *(He slaps at his gavel.)* Bloody thing...

Clack.

MOTHER and FATHER go, leaving NANCY and ALICE alone together.

Now this looks more promising.

NANCY is looking at ALICE's ring.

ALICE: Real sapphire, that.

NANCY: Lovely and dainty, isn't it?

ALICE: You mean small.

NANCY: When is it?

ALICE: Next month, probably, maybe February.

NANCY: I've been busting to tell you, Alice: I've joined the act. I'm on stage now, singing and dancing.

ALICE: You wouldn't.

NANCY: Yes. I do.

ALICE: You lift your skirts, do you, and show your legs?

NANCY: I don't wear skirts. I wear trousers. Gentlemen's suits.

NANCY unpins her false plait revealing her cropped haircut. ALICE gasps.

CHAIRMAN: Now we're getting somewhere...

ALICE: She's made you strange, that woman. She's bad for you. Taken you away and made you strange.

NANCY: Bad for me? She's the best thing that ever happened.

Alice – me and Kitty, we love each other. Not as friends. As sweethearts. We've made our lives together.

ALICE: Don't you dare tell Father and Mother about this, you'll break their hearts.

Might be alright in London, but not here.

NANCY: What d'you mean alright in London?

ALICE: Coming in here like a visiting Duchess when you're living a tart's life

NANCY: Least I got out of bloody Whitstable.

CHAIRMAN: Oh yeah, that's more like it. What about when Mum and Dad join in too?

MOTHER and FATHER rejoin the scene.

FATHER: Say sorry to Alice

NANCY: Well come on, she's marrying *Tony*

MOTHER: He's a very nice boy – don't see any rings on your fingers

NANCY: Yeah, ask me why

FATHER: And what's wrong with Whitstable anyway?

NANCY: Stupid provincial little town with stupid little

MOTHER: Apologise, madam!

NANCY: I won't

MOTHER: You've done nothing but sneer since you walked in. I saw you looking at the Toby jugs. Think you're too good for us

NANCY: What do you know, you've never been anywhere

MOTHER: Pretending you don't know Agnes.

NANCY: I've never met Agnes!

(To ALICE.) And don't try and tell me you're not pregnant.

MOTHER: Nancy!

ALICE: I wish you'd never come back

NANCY: Fine, I'll go then.

Clack.

CHAIRMAN: And that's it! Nancy Astley, Nan King, whatever her name is, off back to London with her tail between her legs but her head held high and you'll never guess what she finds when she gets there...

Clack.

NANCY stands frozen in the doorway of the bedroom. KITTY is sitting up in the bed, naked with a sheet pulled around her.

WALTER is at the wash-stand, wearing only trousers, his hands dripping wet.

NANCY: What's this?

KITTY pulls the sheet up higher over herself. WALTER grabs his shirt and pulls it on.

WALTER: You've surprised us, Nan. We didn't expect you till tomorrow.

NANCY: How long have you been here, Walter?

WALTER: You shouldn't have seen this. Come downstairs and we'll talk.

NANCY: It isn't true

Kitty?

Tell me, say it isn't true.

KITTY: I'm sorry.

NANCY: What, you and him?

KITTY: I'm sorry.

NANCY: All this time?

KITTY: No – no, only last night. I swear.

NANCY: Have you told him about me, about us?

KITTY: Nan –

NANCY: Has she told you what we do? We're lovers. We fuck each other.

WALTER: Two girls? I hardly think – How can two girls be lovers?

NANCY: I fucked her before you ever did.

WALTER: Now, Nan.

NANCY: You said you loved me. You said we'd be together, for ever.

KITTY: I never said

NANCY: You let me think it. You made me think it.

KITTY: Nan, we're known, we're looked at – you must know we can't

NANCY: Do you love him?

Do you?

WALTER: We planned, Nan, to tell you tomorrow, tell you everything.

NANCY: What do you mean *everything*?

WALTER: We're to be married.

NANCY: But what – but what about me?

KITTY: Nancy, I was going to talk to you about this, please

We were going to talk about this alone. Because I think the three of us, in time

NANCY: You've killed me, Kitty.

WALTER: There's no point reasoning with her.

KITTY: Can't you see how this is for the best?

NANCY lunges at KITTY.

Walter!

WALTER grabs NANCY and pulls her away.

WALTER: If you hurt her

NANCY: I'd like to kill her! If I had a pistol on me now, I'd shoot her through the heart.

KITTY cries and WALTER takes her in his arms.

NANCY backs away, then turns and flees, grabbing her travelling bag as she goes.

CHAIRMAN: Oh Nancy! You run, girl. Don't look back, there's nothing there for you now. You run till your heart's tearing out of your chest and every muscle burning and you keep on you keep on running.

But where? Where would you go if you'd nowhere to run to?

How about... Smithfield? Not Smithfield like you know it now, posh sausages, artisan bakery, cocktail in a jam jar, no. Smithfield where your shoes stick to the pavement and there's blood running in the gutters, air heavy with blood and flies. Dead animals brought in, bought, sold, heaved about. Children in the street playing with bones.

If you ate trotters back then it weren't 'cause you were posh it was 'cause you were desperate, and if you lived here, god knows it weren't 'cause you chose to. Unless you were coming with some kind of death wish, unless you knew deep inside it's where you belong. 'Cause this is where they keep the carcasses. The dead meat market.

Several large slabs of meat are lowered on hooks. Some butchers in warehouse overalls work on the carcasses.

Another hook is lowered with NANCY hanging on it. She sings a song of heartbreak and abandonment. The large slabs of meat – in fact puppets – sing with her.

At the end of the song, the butchers unhook NANCY and lay her on a bed.

Then we're in a room in a shabby boarding house. NANCY lies on the bed, dejected. There's a small knock at the door.

A girl in her mid-teens comes in, carrying a coal bucket.

MARY: Coal, miss.

NANCY: Thank you.

MARY goes over to the fireplace and puts down the bucket. She sniffs the air.

MARY: Open the window for you, miss?

NANCY: No. Thank you.

MARY: It does open, that one, if you ever

NANCY: How long have I been here, Mary?

MARY: Couldn't say, miss. Six weeks? Seven weeks?

MARY takes the chamber pot from under the bed and carries it carefully towards the door. NANCY pushes herself up to sitting.

NANCY: Did you get my

MARY: Oh yes.

MARY looks around for somewhere to put the chamber pot, but can't see anywhere, so puts it on the floor.

She takes a packet of cigarettes out of her pocket and hands it to NANCY.

I got you a pie as well.

MARY holds out a pie wrapped in newspaper.

Just thought you should eat something, miss. You gave me tuppence over, so.

NANCY doesn't take it, so MARY places it on the bed next to her.

Sorry it's wrapped in newspaper. Be alright, though. Still hot.

NANCY: Do I seem strange to you, Mary?

MARY: Look a bit strange, miss. Your hair.

NANCY: Does Mrs Best think I'm mad?

MARY: She don't mind what you are, miss, long as you pay your rent on time and you don't bring any gentlemen back.

NANCY laughs.

I seen you this morning, miss, standing at the window, staring.

Whyn't you go outdoors? Go for a walk. Sun's out.

NANCY: I'm alright.

MARY picks up the chamber pot, goes to leave.

MARY: You know there's nicer places you could stay, miss. Seems you've got a bob or two.

NANCY: I'm alright here. Thank you.

MARY goes. NANCY smokes, looks down at the pie and idly unfolds a corner of the newspaper wrapping.

Something catches her eye and she looks more closely, then pulls the paper off the pie and smooths it out.

CHAIRMAN: What's this she's got, then?

NANCY steps away from the bed, away from the piece of paper, and stands staring at it.

Something she don't like the look of, that's for sure. Who'da thought – the one day Mary brings her a pie, the one particular page of the newspaper.

NANCY steps back to the bed and lifts the piece of paper, reading it.

'Green Room Gossip: a complete chronicle of the professional, social and managerial movements of the London Stage'. And the headline:

NANCY: 'Butler and Bliss'...

CHAIRMAN: 'Music Hall's Happiest Newly-Weds'

'Mr Walter Bliss and Miss Kitty Butler were married at the end of January, and honeymooned on the Continent.'

There's even a picture. Bunch of roses in her hand.

Roses.

NANCY looks around the room, suddenly sees it clearly: unbearable, oppressive and dirty.

She puts a hand to her head, and notices how dirty her hair feels. She sniffs the armpit of her dress and recoils in disgust.

NANCY: Mary! Mary!

MARY rushes to the door.

MARY: What is it, miss?

NANCY: I'd like a bath, please. I'm going out.

NANCY goes to the bed and looks under it. She pulls out her bag, opens it, and looks inside. She pulls out the red jacket from the soldier suit.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel. NANCY changes out of her dress and into the soldier suit.

CHAIRMAN: Well you know what they say, ladies and gentlemen: beware of pies bearing news. Was she hoping – somewhere deep down – was she hoping Kitty'd come and find her? Snuffed that out, haven't we? That room's no good to her now, full of the stench of rotten roses, she can't breathe. So what d'you do when your safe house isn't safe anymore?

He clacks his gavel to bring her outdoors. NANCY is initially shocked, but gains confidence. She lights a cigarette then stands smoking it (overhand style) and looking around.

Oh yes. Cool as you like. Ain't half bad, as it turns out, being a bloke.

Ladies and gentlemen, she's strutted all the way from Smithfield to Soho Square without anyone spotting her subterfuge and now here she is. Nancy Astley: Master of Disguise.

Out of nowhere a young man grabs NANCY by the throat.

SWEET ALICE: The fuck d'you think you're doing?

NANCY: What?

SWEET ALICE: I might be a mary-anne but that doesn't mean I won't sock you one if you're on my patch, don't think I can't.

NANCY: I'm not doing anything.

SWEET ALICE: Wiggling that tight little bum at anything that passes, don't think I haven't seen you. Smooth face like you've been buttered, just happen to be standing there smoking a fag but if a trick comes along you're not going to say no on my account are you?

NANCY: I don't understand.

SWEET ALICE: This is my patch. Here to the cab stand. Everyone knows it, everyone respects it.

NANCY: I'm just out for a walk.

SWEET ALICE: Now fuck off before I put your cock out of action for a week.

NANCY: I haven't got a cock.

SWEET ALICE: You what?

NANCY: God, look

I'm a girl, ok? I'm a girl.

SWEET ALICE takes a step back. NANCY has a chance now to look at him. He's very young and pretty and rather girlishly dressed, but wearing very tight trousers.

SWEET ALICE: And here's me thinking I've seen it all.

NANCY: Well now you have.

SWEET ALICE: Look I just don't take kindly to anyone skimming off my patch, that's why I

NANCY: Don't worry, I'm going.

SWEET ALICE: Disguise, is it? On the run from the law? Alice can keep a secret.

NANCY: Who's Alice?

SWEET ALICE: That's me. Sweet Alice to them that's had a taste.

NANCY: My sister's called Alice.

SWEET ALICE: So's mine. Only she's dead of the 'flu.

NANCY: It's just for safety, it makes me feel safer.

SWEET ALICE: Convincing, aren't you?

NANCY: Flat-chested, it helps.

What did you mean, I'm on your patch, what's a patch?

SWEET ALICE: You're standing in my place of work.

NANCY: Work?

SWEET ALICE: I'm a renter, amn't I?

NANCY: What d'you rent?

SWEET ALICE: My arse.

NANCY: Oh I see. Sorry.

SWEET ALICE: I'm not. Good money. Imagine sitting in an office all day.
I make ten times that.

NANCY: No, I mean I didn't really know that's a thing. A job.

SWEET ALICE: Bless you, what d'you think they're all here for, then?

He gestures around the square. NANCY looks.

NANCY: What, all these

SWEET ALICE: You're about the only body on the square who isn't
buying or selling.

NANCY: Gent over there just reading a paper.

SWEET ALICE: Might as well have it upside down for all the reading he's
doing.

NANCY turns to look.

Don't look! *Subtle.*

NANCY turns more subtly, sees the gentleman.

Stroking his whiskers, that's a come-on.

NANCY: Looks like someone I used to know.

SWEET ALICE: They all look the same with their trousers down. Like
little pink piglets. You have them in the palm of your hand, they
have to trust you with their proudest possession, you could bite it, do
anything. You turn them into timid little boys and then you charge
them and you walk away. It is the sweetest of revenges on every man
who ever made you cry.

NANCY: But *all* these men here

SWEET ALICE: You'd do quite well if you wanted to.

NANCY: But I'm a

SWEET ALICE: No one need know – plenty of hand-work and mouth-work to be had. Needn't let the absence in your trousers hold you back.

NANCY: No, I

What sort of money?

SWEET ALICE: Let me look at you.

Ripe mouth, just like a girl's... Little hands, they like that.

I reckon you could ask a sovereign for a suck. Bit less for a handshake.

NANCY: A sovereign?

SWEET ALICE: You picked the right uniform – cock-handlers and suckers, almost exclusively, guardsmen. And never let their own parts be touched. Proud to the point of mania on that score.

NANCY: Actual real guardsmen do this?

SWEET ALICE: D'you know what they're paid in the army? Safer in uniform, too.

You've only to be a wee bit careful – don't go getting in any carriages. Gents in carriages tend to want something more than you've got to offer. And keep an eye out for coppers. Like I say, all look the same with their trousers down.

NANCY: So how do I

SWEET ALICE: How d'you spot a trick? A look that stays on you for half a moment longer than it ought. Ask you for a light sometimes, see them appraising your bum. Handkerchief, the way he holds his cane.

You up for it, soldier?

NANCY: I thought I was on your patch.

SWEET ALICE: Different flavours, aren't we? If it turns out your gent wants a warm place to park his Percy, you can send him my way. And vicey versey.

Have you got a handkerchief?

NANCY: Yes?

SWEET ALICE holds his hand out for it. NANCY hands it over.

SWEET ALICE: Reckon you need a little something.

He folds and rolls the handkerchief into a cigar shape and hands it back to NANCY. She looks back at him, confused.

Tuck it in your drawers.

NANCY does so. They both look down at the bulge in NANCY's trousers.

Just touch it once in a while. As if you're adjusting yourself.

NANCY 'adjusts' herself.

SWEET ALICE: Yes, very good. Let's go.

What name d'you go by?

NANCY: Kitty. Kitty King.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel.

A 'seaside photo board' with face-holes arrives, depicting five generic Victorian gentlemen. The face-holes are filled by members of the ensemble.

SWEET ALICE: Now look, here's a customer for you.

NANCY: Where?

A flap pings open on the crotch of one of the Victorian gentlemen. A musical instrument pops out of it (eg. a penny whistle).

SWEET ALICE: You've only to kneel down and put your mouth to it. Close your eyes.

NANCY does so and plays a note on the instrument. The gentleman's face reacts.

NANCY stands up again.

See, not so bad, is it? Sovereign for that.

NANCY wipes her mouth and is given a coin.

Oh look, here's another.

Another flap opens, this time with a different instrument. NANCY kneels to it, plays the note, gets a coin.

Then another flap opens, with a cowbell.

Wants a hand job, this one.

NANCY rings the bell with her hand, and gets a coin.

Yeah, not too bad, you know? Leave you to it, you're a natural.

SWEET ALICE leaves. NANCY 'meets' another two cock-instruments, getting much more proficient as she goes.

She notices a relationship between the notes she's played on the cocks, and goes back to revisit some of them. She realises she can add them up into a tune.

NANCY plays the tune haltingly, which we recognise as God Save The Queen.

NANCY practises and gets better.

She plays the tune brilliantly, and at the end of it all of the glory holes 'ejaculate' at once, like party poppers. NANCY retires, exhausted but proud, her pockets full of money.

CHAIRMAN: Well don't she fall on her feet, our Nancy? I say feet, fell on her knees is more accurate, ain't it?

He takes a couple of pieces of paper from his pocket.

Got some reviews just in: 'Five Stars, would recommend to a friend', Mr H from Fitzrovia. 'Best suck in Soho', Mr B, Hampstead. 'Lovely little hands', Lord Woolford QC.

Nothing so nice as finding out you've got a talent and getting paid for it, is there?

A woman (FLORENCE) walks across the stage. NANCY tips her hat to her.

NANCY: 'Ello.

FLORENCE: Good morning.

FLORENCE continues on her way, a satchel over her shoulder and a sheaf of papers in her hand. NANCY watches her.

CHAIRMAN: Oh yeah, what's this then?

NANCY pulls a trick costume-change, appearing suddenly in a dress.

Looks like someone's taking a lunch break...

NANCY picks up two ice creams. FLORENCE appears again, handing out leaflets on a street corner.

NANCY approaches FLORENCE, an ice cream in each hand.

NANCY: Would you like an ice cream?

FLORENCE: What?

NANCY: Would you like an ice cream? I've got two.

FLORENCE: I can see.

NANCY: The lady at the cart over there gave me two instead of one.

I think she liked the look of me.

FLORENCE: Liked the *look* of you?

NANCY: Well I think maybe she can't count, which doesn't bode well for future business.

Anyway, would you like one?

FLORENCE: Thanks, but I'm working.

NANCY: You couldn't stop for two minutes, just for an ice cream?

It's delicious. It's Italian.

FLORENCE: Still.

NANCY: You should have a little break.

FLORENCE: What if someone actually wants a leaflet?

NANCY: Only I can't eat them both and it'd be sad to let it go to waste.

FLORENCE: You could give it someone else.

NANCY: To be honest I bought it for you, so I could talk to you. Do you mind?

FLORENCE: You didn't need to spend your money, could've just said hello. I'm quite friendly.

NANCY: Hello, then.

FLORENCE: Hello then.

FLORENCE points to one of the ice creams.

You're dripping.

NANCY: This is the one I bought for you, so actually *you're* dripping.

FLORENCE laughs.

You're actually going all over my sleeve, so

FLORENCE: Come here.

FLORENCE takes the ice cream and licks all the drips off quickly.

Thanks.

NANCY takes a leaflet from FLORENCE's pile.

NANCY: What's this you've got, then?

FLORENCE: Oh, its

NANCY: 'The Freemantle Trust Home for Friendless Girls'.

Haven't you got any friends?

FLORENCE laughs.

FLORENCE: No, I've got lots of friends. It's my job.

NANCY: Charity, is it?

FLORENCE: Yeah.

NANCY: What sort of charity?

FLORENCE: Why?

NANCY: I'm interested. You're supposed to be giving these out, right?

FLORENCE: We look after girls who've got themselves in trouble.

NANCY: In trouble.

FLORENCE: All kinds of trouble. Prostitution, pregnancy, abuse, nowhere else to go. We help them get their life back.

NANCY: We get the church ladies here sometimes, shaking tins for the workhouse.

FLORENCE: Yeah, it's exactly not that. We try to keep girls *out* of the workhouse. I'd say we're more practical. If I'm being kind.

NANCY: And if you're not being kind?

FLORENCE: I'd say there's a lot of stupid things done by wealthy church ladies who've never been to the East End.

NANCY: Have you been to the East End?

FLORENCE: Been there, live there. Bethnal Green all my life.

And the people are amazing. But poor, really poor, so how d'you help them find the energy to change their lives for the better? How d'you get a woman politically engaged when her kids are crying 'cause they're cold and hungry and her old man's down the pub with the housekeeping? She's not got time. I mean, that's the real Woman Question, isn't it?

NANCY: I'm afraid I'm not quite up to date on the Woman Question.

FLORENCE: You ever been groped in the street?

NANCY: Yes.

FLORENCE: Worried if your money's safe under the mattress?

NANCY: Yes.

FLORENCE: If you did the exact same job as a man, would you expect the same pay as him?

NANCY: Well. Yes.

FLORENCE: Then you're plenty up to date on the Woman Question.

NANCY: What's your name?

FLORENCE: Florence.

NANCY: Pretty.

FLORENCE: Bit floral for my taste.

NANCY: What are you doing tonight?

FLORENCE: Why?

NANCY: Would you like supper? You could tutor me on the Woman Question.

FLORENCE: Come on.

NANCY: I mean it.

FLORENCE: Sorry, I'm going to a lecture tonight. Municipal socialism.

NANCY: Alright.

FLORENCE: I suppose I might be hungry afterwards.

FLORENCE smiles.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel.

CHAIRMAN: What a result! Looks like Nancy Astley is rejoining the race, don't it? Where you going to take her, Nancy girl? Oyster platter at Kettners? I can hear the champagne popping already.

NANCY changes back into her boy-clothes.

Means getting back to work, though. If she's shelling out for a fancy supper later – three courses, wine, a tip for the coat-boy. How many cocks is that? Best foot forward, soldier. Put your mouth where the money is.

The CHAIRMAN spots a man lurking in the shadows.

Here's a trick for you.

The band play a quick burst of 'suspense' music.

Oh dear, don't like the sound of that...

NANCY: (*To the MAN.*) Up for it, captain? Up for a bit of sport?

MAN: Might be.

NANCY: Cost you a sovereign. Best blow job you ever had. Follow me down the alleyway in a moment or two

MAN: I've a carriage round the corner

NANCY: Sorry sir, I don't get in carriages. I'll go round the back of the Horseshoes with you, but not in a carriage

MAN: Ain't got no choice I'm afraid

NANCY: Are you a copper?

NANCY starts to walk away but the man follows her and throws a canvas bag over her head. NANCY screams. The man drags her off.

CHAIRMAN: Now that's more like it! Here's a show! I promised you drama, didn't I?

Don't be alarmed, ladies, that gentleman's not dragging her off to do her a mischief. He's just following instructions from his employer, delivering Nancy to the next big chapter of her life – another fantastic opportunity to not be Nancy – an audition, if you like, to star in the most extraordinary act never seen on the London stage.

The lights brighten to reveal NANCY standing in a sumptuously decorated parlour.

A handsome woman in her late thirties stands looking at NANCY. She exudes a powerful sexuality.

NANCY: I think there's been a misunderstanding.

DIANA: Oh?

NANCY: Believe me, I haven't got what you're looking for

DIANA steps closer to NANCY, raises her hands and runs them over the front of NANCY's jacket, then towards her crotch, where she feels the folded cravat NANCY has hidden there.

DIANA begins to unfasten NANCY's trouser buttons, then gasps in pretend shock.
She takes a corner of the cravat and pulls it out slowly, like a magician.

DIANA: *Presto!*

NANCY: See, I'm a girl.

DIANA holds the silk cravat to her lips.

DIANA: You little fool.

Then steps away and lights a cigarette.

Cigarette, darling?

DIANA comes over to NANCY and places her own cigarette between her lips.

NANCY takes a long pull on the cigarette which makes her giddy.

NANCY: What sort of a

DIANA: They're Turkish. Nothing sinister, just a very pleasant herb.

You must think me rather rude.

NANCY: Rude?

DIANA: To have brought you so far, without enquiring after your name.

NANCY: It's Miss Nancy King.

DIANA: *If you were King of Pleasure, and I were Queen of Pain...*

You're very handsome, Miss King.

DIANA offers NANCY another drag of the cigarette, which she accepts.

There – good, isn't it?

Now...

DIANA runs a hand down NANCY's chest again. NANCY straightens a little.

How prim you are all of a sudden. You aren't so dainty with the gentlemen of Soho.

Oh yes, I've been watching you.

It's marvellous what one can see from one's carriage, if one is quick and keen and patient. One may follow one's quarry like a hound with a fox – and all the time the fox not know itself pursued – might think itself only about its little private business: lifting its tail, wiping its lips...

I did wonder if you might have seen the carriage once or twice.

NANCY: I keep away from carriages.

DIANA: But you like it now, don't you, the thought of an *audience*?

DIANA lets her hand stray to NANCY's crotch.

Yes, see. Did you think you could play at Ganymede forever? Did you think if you wore a silken cock, it meant you never had a cunt at the seam of your drawers?

You thought, perhaps, to stifle your appetites, but you have only made them swell the more.

NANCY: I like to agree terms before any

DIANA: Dear me, how tedious.

NANCY: I don't step into a doorway for less than a sovereign.

DIANA laughs.

DIANA: Very wise.

There's a Persian story I read as a girl, about a princess and a beggar and a djinn. The beggar sets the djinn free from a bottle, and is rewarded with a wish. But the wish – as ever – comes with conditions. The man may live in ordinary comfort for seventy years, or he may live in pleasure – with a princess for a wife, and servants to bathe him, and robes of gold – he may live in pleasure, for five hundred days. Which would you choose, if you were the beggar? The comfort, or the pleasure?

NANCY: The pleasure. I suppose.

DIANA: And so did the beggar.

Would it be so bad to surrender to it? To be pleased, and give pleasure, in your turn. To live with me here, say, and enjoy my privileges. Eat from my table, and ride in my carriage, and wear the clothes I pick out for you – and remove them, too, when I ask it. Sleep in my bed when I choose, and your own room when I want to sleep alone. To be what the sensational novels call *kept*.

Could you give up the doorways of Soho for that?

NANCY: If I wanted to.

DIANA: No, my dear. If *I* wanted you to. And I haven't yet asked, have I? I shall have to hear you sing before your supper is served.

NANCY: Supper.

DIANA: What, darling?

NANCY: I'm supposed to be somewhere. I should

DIANA: Supposed to be somewhere?

NANCY: Supposed to meet someone.

DIANA: Somewhere else? Is there anywhere else? There needn't be.

DIANA waits. NANCY makes a decision and comes towards her.

DIANA twists her hand in the back of NANCY's hair, then kisses her. NANCY responds hungrily.

NANCY reaches out to put her hands on DIANA's waist, but DIANA grabs her wrists.

No no – not yet.

DIANA takes a key from a chain around her neck and hands it to NANCY. She points to a wooden chest at the end of the bed.

Open the chest there.

NANCY goes to the wooden chest. She opens it with the key and as she does, a golden light shines out from inside it. Nancy looks at the contents in wonder.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel.

CHAIRMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, never before seen in polite circles – but you didn't come here for politeness, did you? – ever pushing the limits of acceptability and courting sensation wherever she goes, in an act that'd stop traffic and might yet close the theatre down, I give you Madame Diana and her Box of Delights!

NANCY and DIANA have wild, dangerous, aerial sex, the room seeming to spin and shake with them. NANCY's appetite is awakened in the course of the encounter.

The act builds to a climax and ends with NANCY and DIANA lying together, sweaty and quite spent.

DIANA laughs.

DIANA: Oh you exquisite little tart!

Interval.

ACT TWO

The CHAIRMAN strolls out in front of the curtain.

CHAIRMAN: 'Ello again. Nice interval? Right, where were we? Bit of a whirlwind first half, shall we have a recap?

Nancy Astley! Shy little oyster girl goes to the music hall, falls in love with male impersonator Kitty Butler, gets job as Kitty's dresser, Kitty tells her she's moving to London, would you like to come with me? Would I ever! Train to London, all the noises? Kitty's no big deal in the big smoke, Nancy puts on a pair of trousers – boom, she's a brilliant girl-boy, let's do a double act. Double act takes the town, couldn't be better except Nancy's still unrequited. Slap! I'm in love with you! I'm in love with you too! – flying sex, beautiful – everything rosy till Nancy comes back from Christmas and Walter's taken her side of the bed. Runs away in horror, ends up in shitty Smithfield – singing meat, remember? – soldier suit, rent boy – musical cocks – then bag on head, kidnap, rich lady, swinging from the chandelier and I think that's pretty much where we left her, isn't it?

And what now – Did she get the part, you're wondering, as Diana Lethaby's kept lover? Oh yeah, she got it alright. And the appetite on this woman, you wouldn't believe it. Not that our Nan don't give her a run for her money, she don't mind singing for her supper, breakfast, lunch and tea if there's this much fun in the toybox, if there's this many roles to play...

NANCY performs a quick-change routine for DIANA, transforming herself into a number of different male characters and attending to DIANA's every whim.

At the end of the act, DIANA kisses NANCY and leaves. NANCY changes into an expensive silk bathrobe and reclines on a chaise.

BLAKE, a young housemaid, comes in with coffee and a sumptuous breakfast on a tray.

NANCY: Morning.

BLAKE: Morning, miss.

NANCY: Is it still morning?

BLAKE: No, it's the afternoon miss.

NANCY: Already? Where is she?

BLAKE: Mrs Lethaby's out making calls, miss.

NANCY: Amazed she's got the energy. I don't think we slept at all last night.

BLAKE: Coffee, miss?

NANCY: God, yes.

BLAKE pours a cup for NANCY.

Thank you. Ooh, hot.

BLAKE: Blow on it for you?

NANCY laughs.

NANCY: No. Thank you, I can do it.

BLAKE goes around with a basket, picking up discarded clothing and underwear.

Quiet without her, isn't it?

Cigarette?

BLAKE: No miss. They're funny ones, those.

NANCY: They're very nice, have you tried one?

BLAKE: No.

NANCY: Even when she's out?

BLAKE: No, miss. I don't think the mistress would like it miss.

BLAKE picks up an object – clearly a strap-on leather dildo – to put into the basket.

NANCY: Oh Blake I don't mean you to

BLAKE: S'alright miss.

NANCY: No, really – just leave it, I'll

BLAKE hangs the strap-on over the back of a chair.

Thank you.

BLAKE sits down in front of NANCY, takes one of NANCY's hands and rubs hand-cream into it.

NANCY: It's quite a toybox she's got there.

I'm actually a bit sore. Is that shocking?

BLAKE: Not for me to say, miss.

NANCY: That smells nice. All the perfumes of Arabia.

BLAKE: Other hand?

NANCY: You know there's parts of me I never knew existed that start fizzing soon as she comes in. Soon as I hear her feet on the stairs, I go to liquid.

BLAKE: Sounds very nice, miss.

NANCY: Where shall I be when she comes in? Lounging like this?

NANCY moves to the window and leans on the frame looking into the room.

Or this? Which do you think is best? Maybe looking out, like this?

BLAKE looks towards the door, listening.

BLAKE: That's Mrs Lethaby back, miss.

NANCY: Pass me the cane.

BLAKE hands NANCY a cane, and NANCY stands leaning on it, regarding herself in the mirror.

DIANA comes in, a large box in her hands. NANCY turns around slowly.

DIANA: Isn't my tart a handsome brute, Blake?

BLAKE: Yes, ma'am.

DIANA comes over to NANCY and kisses her, putting a hand inside the bathrobe.

DIANA: Did you bathe?

NANCY: For an hour. I smell delicious.

DIANA: This is for you.

NANCY: What is it?

DIANA opens the box and pulls out a beautiful gentleman's suit. NANCY comes over to touch the fabric. She sees something on the cuff of the jacket.

'N.K.', it says.

DIANA: I had them embroider your initials. Thank your mistress nicely, Nancy King.

NANCY grabs DIANA and kisses her.

After a moment NANCY breaks off, aware that BLAKE is still in the room. DIANA realises. She catches sight of the strap-on hanging on the chair and picks it up.

Ah, the device. Would you clean this for us, Blake?

BLAKE holds out the basket and DIANA drops the dildo into it. BLAKE leaves.

You know you needn't worry about little Blake. Her tastes are the same as yours.

NANCY: She's always looking at me.

DIANA: I'm sure you remind her of torrid nights of passion at the reformatory I plucked her from. You're probably just her type.

Do you like the suit?

NANCY: Very much.

DIANA: I think we'll be a sensation.

NANCY: What are we doing?

DIANA: This is your coming-out suit. You needn't say anything – in fact, don't – the spectacle will do it all. I'm taking you to my club.

NANCY: Now?

DIANA: Yes. But you're to fuck me first. I want to smell of you.

DIANA takes a pair of scissors from the table and hands them to NANCY. DIANA leans over and NANCY runs the scissors up the back of her corset, snipping the strings.

Clack!

CHAIRMAN: To her club, she says. And not the kind of club you lot go to, believe me. An unassuming town house just up from Piccadilly, these days it's one of those sandwich shops – you've probably stopped there for a chicken-avocado and a flat white – and back then just a small name-plate and a narrow door. But once we get inside, a whole new stage for Nancy to play on. And what a stage it is! Ladies and Gentlemen: Nan King meets the Most Discerning Audience in Town, the ladies of the Cavendish Club...

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel and we're in the Cavendish Ladies' Club. The drawing room is full of women, eccentrically attired – despite wearing skirts, there is something a little mannish about all of them.

MRS JEX smokes a cigar, the queen bee of the place, and a fairly striking woman, EVELYN sits close by. A younger woman, DICKIE, sits on the arm of EVELYN's chair, smoking. She is dressed as a boy, but less convincingly than NANCY.

MRS JEX: She has vowed herself to seven women.

EVELYN: Seven!

MRS JEX: Sees them all on different days. And one of them – one of them is her sister-in-law, isn't that delicious?

EVELYN: Scandalous, but I'd expect nothing less from Lady Myers.

DICKIE: Tired old lesbian.

EVELYN: Down, Dickie.

MRS JEX: And are we all here to inspect Diana's new pet?

DICKIE: Oh, is Diana coming?

MRS JEX: As if you didn't know. You're panting with anticipation, I can tell. Are you worried you might have a rival Principal Boy?

EVELYN: Dickie's irreplaceable, surely.

MRS JEX: Do we know where she picked up this new delicacy? None of my acquaintance seem to be missing a wife or a daughter.

EVELYN: She's been quite the mystery about it. She's hardly been here and she's never at home to callers.

MRS JEX: You've called, have you?

EVELYN: Once or twice.

DICKIE: Every day.

EVELYN: Light please, Dickie.

DICKIE strikes a match and leans to light EVELYN's cigarette. A ripple among the company indicates the arrival of DIANA and NANCY. MRS JEX stands.

MRS JEX: Diana Lethaby you old roué!

DIANA: Maria. This is Miss King, my new companion.

This, Nancy, is Mrs Jex. My oldest friend in London – and quite the most disreputable. Everything she tells you will be designed to corrupt.

MRS JEX shakes NANCY's hand. EVELYN and DICKIE stand.

Hello Evelyn. This is Miss King.

EVELYN: Miss King. This is Dickie.

DICKIE and NANCY bow to each other.

MRS JEX: And why have you not brought Miss King to show us before? It is very naughty of you.

DIANA: Nancy and I have been rather busy getting acquainted, I'm afraid.

MRS JEX: Then you must let us get acquainted too. Wherever did Diana find you, my dear?

DIANA: Under a streetlamp, no less. Very romantic. Destiny swept you into my path, didn't she darling?

MRS JEX: But where?

DIANA: Oh, Kensington somewhere, maybe it was Piccadilly.

MRS JEX: And has she shown you her box, Miss King?

A gasp from the ladies at the next-door table, who are not-so-subtly eavesdropping.

Her chest, I meant.

Another gasp. DICKIE sniggers.

Her *wooden* chest. Dickie you're insufferable. I meant this box of Sapphic delights that we've heard so much about. The *instruments of passion*.

DIANA: Of course she's seen it.

EVELYN: Quite a collection, we hear.

MRS JEX: And are you acquainted with a certain French gentleman?

DIANA: Nancy and Monsieur Dildo are the best of friends, yes. Light me a cigarette, would you, child?

NANCY takes a cigarettes from a case and lights it in her own mouth, then hands it to DIANA, leaning close as she does, and touching DIANA's mouth lingeringly. The others watch, entranced.

DIANA sits back and exhales slowly.

MRS JEX: How old are you, Miss King?

NANCY: Twenty.

MRS JEX: Twenty! What a really glorious age that is, Diana. Your youth still hot upon you, like a lover in a pant.

DICKIE: I'm sure I was quite green at twenty.

NANCY: Surprised you remember.

DIANA stiffens a little. EVELYN leans in.

EVELYN: Are you a born Londoner, Miss King?

NANCY: No.

DIANA: Is anyone in London actually from London?

EVELYN: So where are you from?

DIANA: Oh leave the poor child alone.

EVELYN: I'm sure Miss King doesn't mind. Tell us where you're from, dear.

NANCY: Kent.

EVELYN: Sizeable county. Where in particular?

NANCY looks at DIANA.

NANCY: Whitstable.

EVELYN: I didn't know anyone came from Whitstable. A Whitstable Native.

NANCY: Very good.

MRS JEX: Explain?

EVELYN: It's a type of oyster, dear.

NANCY: Finest in the world, as it happens.

EVELYN: I'm right, aren't I? It's a fishing port, Whitstable?

NANCY: Yes.

EVELYN: And are your family rugged seamen?

NANCY: My uncle skippers a smack, yeah.

MRS JEX: I can't understand her, Diana.

DIANA: Her uncle has a boat.

EVELYN: Come up in the world, haven't we?

DICKIE: I cannot bear oysters. Detritivores, aren't they? Bottom-feeders.

NANCY: They are *exquisite*.

Someone tells me they don't like oysters, I wonder what kind of lover they are. I wouldn't kiss someone who wouldn't put an oyster in their mouth.

MRS JEX: Do you say so?

NANCY: Or someone who didn't love the ritual of eating them. Taking that craggy shell in your hand, cupping it...

NANCY lowers her voice and the others lean in to listen, increasingly aroused.

The knife in your other hand, warm handle and cold blade, sliding it in between the shells like you're slicing through corset-strings. The oyster lying there quivering, ready for her beautiful death...

Then lifting the shell to your mouth slowly, sliding, slightly sucking then closing your lips. And you don't swallow like they told you to, no, you let her linger in your mouth, velvet on your tongue, feeling her pull you under the waves until all you are is mouth and oyster and it's almost too much so you surrender...

You swallow and you sigh and you reach for another. And you do it again and again till you're so full of pleasure you can't take any more.

The women are silent, transfixed. NANCY lights a cigarette and exhales slowly.

MRS JEX: Oh Diana your new boy is delightful. A pearl! A Kentish pearl!

DIANA: You can find all sorts of gems if you look in the right places, it doesn't do to be squeamish. You know what they say about sailor boys...

Clack!

CHAIRMAN: And Miss Nan King is launched into society. Reviews just in: 'exquisitely blunt!', 'So authentic!', 'Working-class lovers: get some rough with your tumble'. And everywhere they go, necks craning to get a good look at Diana Lethaby's new boy. What a sensation – no wonder they can't keep their hands off each other when they get home. I mean you could forgive Nancy thinking she's got it all sewn up, couldn't you? On a sunny day you need your ear very low to the ground to know there's a storm coming.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel, bring us back to the parlour: in disarray, after another wild night. NANCY is on the chaise, smoking and holding a cup of coffee. BLAKE goes around the room, picking up items of clothing and underwear, and putting them in a basket.

NANCY: D'you like working here, Blake? Honestly. I won't tell.

BLAKE: I've a room to myself, which is more than most maids get. And Mrs Lethaby don't half pay a decent wage.

NANCY watches as BLAKE picks up a whip and a string of pearls from the floor.

NANCY: Diana told me she got you out of prison. Is it true?

Sorry, do you mind me asking?

BLAKE: It was a *reformat'*ry. It wasn't a gaol.

NANCY: And is it true that they had you in there, because you... kissed another girl?

BLAKE: To my shame, miss, yes. I was sent there on a charge of tampering and corrupting.

NANCY: I'd say tampering and corrupting sounds fun, not shameful at all.

NANCY goes to drink her coffee.

Ooh, hot.

BLAKE comes over, takes the coffee cup and blows on it, looking at NANCY as she does.

BLAKE: Ask you something, miss?

NANCY: Yes.

BLAKE: You'll think me forwarder than I ought to be. But I've been just about busting to know it, ever since I first got a proper look at you. You used to work the halls, didn't you? You used to work the halls, with Kitty Butler, and calling yourself plain Nan King.

NANCY: Yes. Yes I did.

BLAKE: I knew it was you. What a turn it gave me, when I saw you! I never maided for no one famous before.

NANCY: Well, I'm hardly famous now. Are my slippers here?

BLAKE: Somewhere.

BLAKE looks for the slippers.

I remember seeing you at Camden Town, and another time at the Peckham Palace.

And you don't see Miss Butler at all, these days?

NANCY: No.

BLAKE: I can't say I care for the new act much.

NANCY: New act?

BLAKE: Sitting on his lap pretending to be a little boy.

NANCY: What?

BLAKE: Liked it better when she wore a topper and tails, when she was with you.

NANCY: Whose – whose lap is she sitting on?

BLAKE: Bliss, is it?

NANCY: Walter? Walter's in the act now?

BLAKE: Yeah, that's it. Walter Bliss.

NANCY stares into the fire. She lets her cigarette end fall to the floor.

Careful, miss. Dropped your fag there. Don't want you going up in flames, do we?

BLAKE picks up the cigarette stub and throws it into the fire.

Clack!

CHAIRMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, the next turn tonight in the Theatre of Nancy's Twisted Mind, I give you Walter Bliss and Little Kit.

The doors of a large cabinet swing open to reveal WALTER and KITTY sitting inside it – WALTER sitting on a stool and KITTY, dressed as a little boy in a sailor suit, sitting on his lap.

NANCY: No!

WALTER: Hello Kit. Aren't you going to play outside?

KITTY: Don't want to. Outside's boring.

WALTER: Aren't you going to play outside with Nancy?

KITTY: Don't like Nancy anymore.

WALTER: But whyever not?

KITTY: Nancy only wants to play kissing. She runs after me all kissy, it's yuck.

WALTER: Well it's only because she likes you.

KITTY: But she's a *girl*.

WALTER: Poor Nancy.

KITTY: Nancy's smelly

WALTER: Now that's not very nice

KITTY: Nancy's not very nice

WALTER: She hasn't got any other friends apart from you, so you really should be nice to her, even if she is a bit smelly.

KITTY: I WON'T play with her. I won't I won't.

WALTER: I shall have to smack you on the bottom if you don't.

KITTY starts to pretend-cry.

Oh don't cry Little Kit.

Little Kit, did Nancy do something else?

KITTY: No.

WALTER: Something you're not telling me about?

KITTY: Yes.

WALTER: You can tell Daddy.

KITTY: Nancy tried to put her hand in my trousers.

WALTER: Oh dear.

KITTY: And I didn't like it.

WALTER: Poor Little Kit. Horrid Nancy to do that to you.

KITTY: I love you, Daddy.

KITTY leans and plants a kiss on WALTER's whiskers.

You can smack my bottom if you like.

NANCY: Can't stand it.

NANCY runs to the cabinet and slams one door shut

KITTY: Can I have a special snuggle on your lap?

NANCY slams the other door shut and leans against it. WALTER pushes the other door open again from inside.

WALTER: Shall we show the ladies and gentlemen our special snuggle?

NANCY: No!

NANCY slams the door again and leans on both of them, breathing hard.

BLAKE: Found them!

BLAKE holds up the slippers, brings them over to NANCY.

Miss, were you and Kitty Butler – were you together?

NANCY: Don't be stupid, it was an act. Can't you tell the difference?

BLAKE: Sorry miss.

NANCY: You want me to tell Mrs Lethaby you've been asking me questions?

BLAKE: No miss – please miss.

NANCY: Tell her how you look at me when I'm getting dressed?

BLAKE: What?

NANCY: Well you've got to get your kicks somewhere, haven't you?
Your tampering and corrupting.

NANCY takes a piece of lacy underwear from the end of the bed and holds it towards BLAKE.

Have a sniff, go on.

BLAKE: I don't do nothing like that.

BLAKE comes towards her with the basket and holds it out for NANCY to drop the item in. NANCY does so.

She steps away and puts her feet in her slippers.

NANCY: These slippers haven't been warmed!

BLAKE: So sorry miss – I'll do it – I'm so sorry.

BLAKE grabs the slippers and runs from the room, passing DIANA as she goes.

DIANA comes in, taking off her gloves.

DIANA: What's Blake snivelling about?

NANCY: Where were you?

DIANA: An extremely tiresome morning at Mrs Cartwright's. Hearing about other people's charities is almost as tiring as hearing about their children. I should have taken you, to

NANCY kisses DIANA, hard. DIANA recoils slightly.

Nancy

Not right now.

NANCY: I want to fuck.

DIANA: No, Nancy. I'm going for a lie down.

NANCY takes hold of DIANA, forcefully.

Get off me, you're hurting me.

DIANA's sleeve rips as she pulls away from NANCY. They step back, panting with arousal.

Heartless bitch.

NANCY: Say it again.

DIANA: Heartless bitch.

NANCY steps towards DIANA and grabs her dress at the throat and rips it.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel.

CHAIRMAN: Nancy Astley, the Amazing Heartless Woman. Because how else could she bear it but toughen up, lock her heart away in that cabinet? Embrace cruelty.

What a little brute! The ladies can't get enough of her, salivating over every sneer, queuing up for a put-down. And Diana likes it but then she never was one for tenderness, was she? Likes it best if she can turn up to dinner with rope burns on her wrists, know what I mean?

Everyone's a winner, then, right? Music please, lads and lasses. Party time!

The band start to play. The party assembles, the room filled with women in fancy dress.

Diana's birthday but don't ask her how old. *(Coughs over the number.)* Forty.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel and the party comes to life.

NANCY sits in her dressing gown, surveying the room with MRS JEX, EVELYN and DICKIE clustered around her. MRS JEX is dressed as Boudicca, EVELYN as Marie Antoinette and DICKIE as Dorian Gray, in a gentleman's suit.

DIANA is talking to other guests, dressed as the Roman goddess who shares her name, with a quiver of arrows on her back.

MRSJEX: You'll have to tell me, Dickie dear.

EVELYN: She's Dorian Gray, Maria. From Mr Wilde's book.

NANCY: Is she the man himself, or the portrait in the attic?

MRSJEX: Nancy, you're wicked. What of my costume? Could I slay any Vikings in this?

NANCY: I'd say several died in the making of it.

EVELYN: I think every Sapphist in London must be here tonight. I'm sure I've seen another Marie Antoinette in the other room.

NANCY: I've seen seven. That one over there's taking 'let them eat cake' very seriously.

MRSJEX: And how many sailors and soldier boys there are – inspired by you, no doubt.

NANCY: Excruciating. I saw one earlier asking the servant if there was any beer.

DICKIE puts down her glass of beer. DIANA comes over.

DICKIE: Where's your costume, then?

NANCY: You'll see.

DIANA: Everyone's here, Nancy, I think it's time.

NANCY rises.

NANCY: My goddess.

NANCY kisses DIANA and goes off, untying her robe as she goes.

DIANA: Ladies? Ladies? Gather round everyone: my companion Miss King has something to show you all.

A small platform with a curtain pulled across it is wheeled into the centre by servants including BLAKE.

The women shuffle towards positions from which they can see the platform.

EVELYN: What is it, Diana, you're showing us?

DIANA: I've no idea, it's a surprise. Perhaps she's painted me a picture.

We're ready, Nancy, you may show us all.

BLAKE pulls back the curtain to reveal NANCY, costumed as a sexy dog, almost naked with dog ears on her head, a collar and lead around her neck and with a large leather strap-on dildo around her hips.

The crowd gasps, then sighs.

NANCY sings a song expressing dog-like devotion to DIANA.

NANCY steps down from the platform and goes to DIANA. She gives her the lead and kneels down in front of her.

DIANA: Shall we give the ladies a closer look?

DIANA leads NANCY among the women, who reach out to touch the dildo, admiring it. They reach MRSJEX, who also touches the dildo.

MRSJEX: The craftsmanship. So soft.

NANCY: It's calfskin.

MRSJEX: How my husband would admire you: you look like a picture from a buggers' compendium.

They reach EVELYN and DICKIE next.

EVELYN: Dickie and I have a gift for you too, Diana. It's something for your collection. A book.

NANCY: A book? Snore.

EVELYN: Not *a* book so much as *the* book.

EVELYN holds the book out and DIANA takes it.

We had it sent from Paris. The first ever collection of the life-stories of Sapphists from around the world, with supporting illustrations,

MRSJEX: Illustrations?

MRSJEX lunges for the book.

EVELYN: It is very very rare. Only six copies in existence.

MRS JEX: Oh I say. Look at this, Diana.

This is filth of the highest quality.

MRS JEX turns the book upside down, trying to decipher one image.

EVELYN: Perhaps we should pass it around?

DIANA: Why not.

EVELYN: Dickie, would you?

DICKIE takes the book and opens it at a particular page. The women crowd around it.

NANCY: Calm down, it's only a book.

EVELYN: We have seen every inch of you at one time or another, my dear, but we have never seen this.

Here, for example, is the story of a lady with a clitoris as big as a little boy's prick. She claims she caught the malady from an Indian maid.

NANCY: That can't be true.

MRS JEX: No, I've heard of it, Nancy – not of Indian girls, but it's true of the Turks. They're bred like it, that they might pleasure themselves in the seraglio.

DIANA: That's hardly news, it's true of poor girls here too. They're brought up twenty to a bed and the continual frothing makes their clitorises grow.

EVELYN: Here? I don't believe you.

DIANA: Well... perhaps we may prove it. Blake?

BLAKE, who has been circulating with a tray of drinks, comes closer.

Tell the ladies where you lived before I employed you.

BLAKE: In a reformat'ry, ma'am.

MRS JEX: A prison!

DIANA: You know what women get up to in prison, don't you? Come closer, Blake.

BLAKE walks towards her.

Put down the tray.

BLAKE puts her tray down on a side table.

We have been wondering about you, Blake.

BLAKE: Ma'am?

DIANA: We have been wondering about your time at the reformatory.

We have been wondering how you filled your hours. We wonder if you turned frigstress, in your little cell. That you might have frigged yourself so long and so hard, you frigged yourself a cock. We think you might have a cock, Blake, in your drawers.

We want you to lift your skirt, and let us see it.

BLAKE: Please, ma'am, I don't know what you mean!

DIANA: Come along, lift your skirts. Good gracious, girl, we only want to look at you

DIANA puts her hand on BLAKE's skirt, the other ladies ready to step in to assist.

BLAKE: No!

NANCY: Leave it, Diana!

DIANA: What?

NANCY: Leave her, it's boring. It's just a stupid book, not a competition.

DIANA: Forgive her, ladies, Nancy likes to be the centre of attention, she can't bear it when / it's taken away from

NANCY: I like it? / I like it? You live for it.

DIANA: Nancy!

NANCY: Go on, Blake, go back to the kitchen.

DIANA: (*To BLAKE.*) You stay where you are!

(*To NANCY.*) D'you think you are mistress here? What is it to you, if I ask my girl to bare her backside for me? You have bared yours often enough. Perhaps when we have finished with little Blake, we shall all take turns upon you.

EVELYN: They always stick up for each other, servants.

NANCY: I'm not a servant – she doesn't pay me.

DIANA steps to NANCY and strikes her around the face with the book.

NANCY backs away, panting.

DIANA: That is enough.

Nancy thinks it amusing sometimes to kick her little heels, and sometimes of course it is. Tonight it has cost her her dinner.

Ladies, supper is served in the Orchid Room, shall we go through? Nancy will stay here and think about what she's done, so she won't be joining us for the dancing either.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel.

CHAIRMAN: Oh dear, ladies and gentlemen. Didn't want a spell in the actual doghouse, did she?

The CHAIRMAN lifts up the lid of a chest of drawers to reveal a kind of Punch and Judy theatre.

Poor old Nance. Poor old put-upon Nancy.

He pulls out a puppet that looks just like NANCY.

Look at her there, torn up thinking about it – 'What should I have said? What would I say if Diana was standing in front of me right now?'

He pulls out another puppet that looks just like Diana.

Oh, hello.

(*Diana puppet.*) Naughty Nancy. Bad dog.

(*Nancy puppet.*) I've got blood on my cheek.

(Diana puppet.) You made me look silly in front of Mrs Jex and all my other stupid old posh friends.

(Nancy puppet.) You're a bitch.

(Diana puppet.) You're a bitch.

(Nancy puppet.) Bash bash.

(Diana puppet.) Ow ow.

(Nancy puppet.) I wish I'd hit you in front of all your friends

(Diana puppet.) You've got to stay here without any dinner ha ha

(Nancy puppet.) I'll be revenged on you somehow

BLAKE creeps into the room.

BLAKE: Miss? I've got a bit of ice for your cheek, miss.

NANCY turns slowly to look at BLAKE.

CHAIRMAN: Ohhhhh. Oh yes. What about a little private revenge?

(To the band.) We're going to need a bit of music under this, chaps. One of your old drinking songs?

The band strike up and sing drinking songs under the following...

NANCY and BLAKE are sitting on the chaise, NANCY opening a bottle of champagne. NANCY has removed the strap-on, and it lies next to her.

NANCY: Fuck it, why shouldn't we have our own little party up here?

The champagne pops, and BLAKE giggles.

Quick – glass!

BLAKE: There aren't any.

NANCY shrugs and drinks from the bottle, then passes it to BLAKE.

NANCY: Go on.

BLAKE concedes and takes the bottle.

CHAIRMAN: Yeah, we know how this one goes, don't we? Few minutes later...

Clack! The music cranks up a gear and NANCY and BLAKE shift forward a few minutes.

NANCY: Ugly old cows, the lot of them.

BLAKE: I've had my bum felt more times than ever in my life tonight, really I have. You think men are bad, but this lot. No one's safe.

NANCY winces, holding the ice to her cheek.

What an eye you'll have, miss.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel and they shift forward again.

NANCY: Go on, who's this?

NANCY does an impression of DIANA, lifting her chin haughtily. BLAKE laughs.

Guess how old I am, go on.

BLAKE: She thinks she don't look a day over thirty, and yeah, her face is alright, but you take a look at her neck.

Ooh, I've got one – who am I?

BLAKE does an impression of MRS JEX, grabbing a tablecloth to drape over herself.

Hello hello I'm wearing a carpet.

NANCY laughs.

NANCY: I'm *Boudicca*, darling.

BLAKE: Boooooodicca!

Ooh, I shouldn't drink any more.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel and they shift forward again.

BLAKE is lying with her head hanging off the chaise, NANCY pouring champagne into her mouth. Some of it goes across her face, and she sits up, slightly choking, but laughing.

NANCY: I'm having fun, are you?

They look at each other.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel. They move forward in time.

CHAIRMAN: Oh yeah, here we go...

NANCY: You know you're very handsome, Blake.

BLAKE: No...

NANCY: All this time you've been emptying my pot and I don't know your name.

BLAKE: Zena.

NANCY: Can I kiss you, Zena?

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel. They move forward in time.

NANCY and BLAKE are kissing. NANCY moves to kissing BLAKE's neck, fumbling with the buttons of her bodice.

BLAKE: Oh! Oh miss.

What if Mrs Lethaby comes?

NANCY: She won't. She's punishing me.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel. We go forward a few minutes to see BLAKE being strapped into the dildo by NANCY.

NANCY: Look at you – you're splendid.

NANCY leads BLAKE to the mirror to look at herself.

BLAKE: Oh my god.

NANCY turns BLAKE around and kisses her.

DIANA comes to the door, at first unaware of what she's seeing:

DIANA: Nancy come along, you're being asked for.

DIANA sees BLAKE wearing the dildo and shrieks with fury.

NANCY: Diana

DIANA: *(To NANCY.)* You little slut!

You little bitches!

From the hallway several other women appear, including DICKIE, EVELYN and MRS JEX.

(To BLAKE.) Take that thing from your hips, you common little whore.

EVELYN: She has a prick after all.

DIANA: That prick is mine. These little sluts have stolen it!

NANCY springs into action, helping BLAKE – now weeping – to remove the dildo.

EVELYN: Use the strap on her, Diana.

DIANA: They'll strap her well enough at the reformatory.

BLAKE: No! Please!

DICKIE picks up the (now empty) champagne bottle and shows it to EVELYN.

EVELYN: They've gone through a whole bottle.

MRS JEX: Seems your new puppy isn't house-trained, Diana.

DIANA grabs NANCY by the hand, then goes to the cabinet and flings it open.

DIANA: Where is it?

NANCY: What?

DIANA: The bag you came here with, your rotten little knapsack.

DIANA finds the bag in the bottom of the cabinet.

NANCY: No, please Diana

DIANA: Put this on

DIANA pulls a shabby dress out of the bag and flings it at NANCY.

NANCY: I can't wear this

DIANA: You'll wear it, or be thrust naked into the street

(To BLAKE.) And you – show your face here again and I'll return you to that gaol, and make sure you stay there till you rot. Now get out.

BLAKE nods, hurries from the room.

NANCY: Let me at least have my clothes, my suits.

DIANA: Don't you understand? They're my clothes, everything belongs to me.

NANCY: I belong to you.

DIANA: I release you.

NANCY: Diana, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have

DIANA: Put it on or we shall have to make you.

NANCY: Please ladies – help me can't you?

None of them move.

How many times have you looked at me and wanted me? How many times have you said how handsome I am, how much you envy Diana owning me? Any one of you might have me now. Any one of you.

MRS JEX: Diana picked you out of the gutter, a noble experiment. But this show of ingratitude has more than exhausted the ladies' goodwill. You had better rejoin your own kind.

NANCY: Damn you all for a set of bitches, if you let her do this!

DIANA: Get out of my house. Now.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel.

CHAIRMAN: Oh dear. Miss Nancy King, ladies and gentlemen – as you lot might say – is Properly in the Shit.

NANCY puts on the shabby old dress.

What's she going to do? Think, Nancy girl.

Back to Whitstable? Sad music, maestro... (*The band oblige.*) Take me back, Mum and Dad. I'm sorry I left, can I shuck oysters for the rest of my...

No way that's going to work, is there? Option two, back to the music hall?

Without Kitty Butler? Without even a costume to wear and not a penny on you? So, option three, get a gun from somewhere, go back

and shoot Diana in the heart,

POLICEMAN: Move along, please, miss. Morning now, park's open.

NANCY looks at the POLICEMAN, surprised.

CHAIRMAN: Congratulations, Nancy, your first ever night sleeping on a park bench. If you don't fancy the same again tonight, best have a look in that bag, see what you've got to work with

NANCY kneels to rummage in the bag, pulling things out.

Two black buttons, not much good to you. Little comb, no, dig a bit deeper. Box of matches, ooh, what's that?

She pulls out a piece of paper and looks at it.

NANCY: *(Thinking to herself.)* Florence...

CHAIRMAN: *(To the audience.)* Florence – the girl in Soho Square, remember?

Took a proper shine to you, didn't she? Home for Friendless Girls, that sounds about right, don't it? In the absence of other options. Where did she say she lived? Bethnal Green. Bethnal Green...

NANCY thinks then jumps up, looks in the direction the POLICEMAN went.

NANCY: 'Scuse me sir, um, constable – 'scuse me!

CHAIRMAN: Yes, ladies and gentlemen, there she goes. In an act so audacious they'll write a book about it, Miss Nancy Astley is Crossing London Without a Map...

A group of St John's Wood people crowd around her.

The band starts vamping. NANCY picks out one of the people and speaks to them.

NANCY: I'm trying to get to Bethnal Green

STJ.W. 1: Bethnal Green?

NANCY: D'you know where I mean?

I can't go by train cause I haven't a bean

STJ.W. 1: Do I look like a policeman?

NANCY picks another person to ask...

NANCY: I'm trying to get to Bethnal Green

STJ.W. 2: You sure you want to? It's not very clean

Not that I'm saying it's somewhere I've been

But I think it's over eastwards

The POLICEMAN pops up nearby.

CHAIRMAN: Look, Nancy – there's your policeman!

NANCY: Constable! Constable!

Excuse me Constable, I'm trying to get to

The POLICEMAN turns around, but he suddenly swaps hats and becomes a posh gentleman.

MAYFAIR 1: Step aside please, this is Mayfair, not Cheapside.

The people of Mayfair cluster around NANCY.

CHAIRMAN: Lord, Mayfair, of all places. A paradise for the pecunious, but for Nancy...

NANCY: I'm trying to get to

MAYFAIR 2: Out of my way

NANCY: Excuse me, I'm looking for

MAYFAIR 2: What did I say?

I'm busy and wealthy now please go away

This isn't a place for your kind

NANCY: I'm looking for Bethnal

MAYFAIR 3: I'm sorry, good day

NANCY: Could somebody help me, I'm willing to pay?

Well I say that, I haven't got money per se

Can nobody help me to

The POLICEMAN pops up nearby.

Constable! Hello, I need help!

CHAIRMAN: And where's he going to lead her to next, I wonder?

The POLICEMAN turns around, but swaps hats to become a confidence trickster.

The people of Soho cluster around NANCY.

SOHO 1: I'll give you help, darling, what d'you need? All of Soho at your disposal.

NANCY: Soho?

I'm trying to get to Bethnal

SOHO 2: Damn!

You look like a girl who's in need of a man

We'll go for a drink, does that sound like a plan?

NANCY: I haven't the money to

SOHO 2: Bye then!

NANCY picks another person to ask...

NANCY: I'm trying to get to Bethnal Green

SOHO 3: I'll take you to bed make you feel like a queen

SOHO 4: The peep shows in here are the best ever seen

Now wouldn't you like a look-see?

The POLICEMAN pops up nearby.

NANCY: Constable! Excuse me, Constable!

Constable, I didn't mean to end up in Soho, I'm trying to get to

The POLICEMAN turns around, but swaps hats to become a newspaper man.

FLEET ST 1: Soho? This is Fleet Street love.

CHAIRMAN: Slippery place, ain't it, London?

NANCY: Right. Fleet Street.

The people of Fleet Street cluster around NANCY.

FLEET ST 2: If it ain't here, it ain't news. You got a story for me?

NANCY: I'm trying to get to Bethnal

FLEET ST 2: Wow,

The East End is over, it's North London now

If you haven't a newsworthy furrow to plough

I suggest you go and find one

NANCY: But can't you just tell me where Bethnal Green is

I don't want to work in the newspaper biz

I just want directions I don't want a quiz

Is there nobody here who can help?

The POLICEMAN pops up nearby.

Constable!

CHAIRMAN: Now keep it moving lads, where we off to?

NANCY: Constable!

The POLICEMAN turns around, but swaps hats to become a market trader.

Oh where am I *now*?

BRICK LN 1: Brick Lane Market miss.

The people of Brick Lane cluster around NANCY.

NANCY: I'm trying to get

BRICK LN 2: Alive alive oh!

There's rabbits for eating, canaries for show!

Not sixpence, not fivepence, not fourpence or so

But three for the lot, how about it?

NANCY: I just want to go to Bethnal Green

BRICK LN 3: Buy a hat!

BRICK LN 4: Buy a pot!

BRICK LN 5: Buy an adding machine!

BRICK LN 6: We've buttons and bedsteads and all in between

NANCY: No!

BRICK LN 6: Lovely set of salt and pepper shakers?

The POLICEMAN pops up nearby.

NANCY: Constable! Oh please stop I need to speak to you.

Constable!

NANCY catches up with the POLICEMAN and he turns around. This time he stays a POLICEMAN.

POLICEMAN: Can I help you, miss?

NANCY: Oh. Sorry, I

POLICEMAN: Yes, miss?

NANCY: Can you tell me the way to Bethnal Green?

POLICEMAN: Bethnal Green? You're here.

The people of Bethnal Green cluster around NANCY.

CHAIRMAN: The beating heart of London's East End.

NANCY: This is it?

POLICEMAN: Yes miss. Alright miss?

NANCY: Yes I'm looking for someone called Florence.

POLICEMAN: Florence?

BETHNAL 1: Florence, what Florence Banner?

NANCY: I don't know, um probably. You know her?

BETHNAL 1: Everyone knows Florence.

BETHNAL 2: What, Florence Banner?

BETHNAL 1: Don't everybody know Flo?

POLICEMAN: Oh *Flo*, yeah. Everybody knows Flo.

NANCY: And d'you know where she lives?

BETHNAL 2: Quilter Street, ain't it?

NANCY: And where's

CHAIRMAN: Well you know what the East End's like – people queueing up to help you out...

A line of people forms, the person at the front giving each line of directions with a new hat each time.

BETHNAL 3: Go straight down here and second right

Through a square with some trees in it

No, no, go through Arnold Circus

No, that's barmy, go left, right, left again

Right at the man who's filling his pipe

No, not right there, go left – get onto

Hackney Road Hackney Road then first big road on your right

If you get to the chapel you've gone too far

Cross through the flower market – lovely

No, go left round it, follow it round

NANCY: Stop! Please, just one of you?

One hat passes all the way down the queue and each person adds a direction:

BETHNAL 1-10: Straight down here and second right

And right again

Through a square with some trees in it

Left, right, left again

Right at the man who's filling his pipe
Left onto Hackney Road, then first big road on your right
If you get to the chapel you've gone too far
Cross through the flower market – lovely
Go right then left
Then you're on it.

NANCY: Alright, so...

Straight down here and second right
And right again
Through a square with some trees in it
Left, right, left again
Right at the man who's filling his pipe
Left onto Hackney Road, then first big road on my right
If I get to the chapel I've gone too far
Cross through the flower market – lovely
Go right then left...
Go right then left...
Go right then left...
Then I'm on it.

NANCY reaches FLORENCE's doorstep and collapses with exhaustion.

The lights go to black as NANCY faints, and come up again as she revives, in the parlour of FLORENCE's house.

NANCY is in an armchair. FLORENCE stands regarding her carefully, a cup of tea in her hand.

NANCY starts to wake up.

FLORENCE: Alright there? How you feeling?

It's morning now. Must've been exhausted.

You collapsed on the doorstep last night, d'you remember? Gave me a proper fright.

NANCY puts a hand to her cheek.

Nasty cut you've got there. Cup of tea?

FLORENCE holds out the tea and NANCY takes it.

FLORENCE: Thing is, love, I'm not actually sure who you are.

NANCY: You don't remember?

FLORENCE: Have we met? Or is it Ralph you wanted?

NANCY: You don't remember me?

FLORENCE: No, sorry.

NANCY: We met in Soho Square last summer.

FLORENCE: Right?

NANCY: I gave you an ice cream?

FLORENCE: Oh. Oh her.

NANCY: We were going to have dinner.

FLORENCE: Yes, you're about eighteen months late.

NANCY: I'm sorry, something came up.

I didn't forget you.

FLORENCE: I'd never been stood up before.

A man, RALPH, comes into the room, carrying a baby in his arms.

Oh um, this is Ralph. And baby Cyril. This is Miss

NANCY: Astley. Nancy Astley.

RALPH: I hope you're feeling better.

NANCY starts to cry.

RALPH: Oh.

FLORENCE: It seems Miss Astley and I met once. I still don't really know why you're

NANCY: Everything's gone wrong and I've got no one but I remembered you lived in Bethnal Green and you helped friendless girls so

FLORENCE: *Oh*

Oh love. Oh dear. I do help them love, but not *here*. At work. At the girls' home, people go there if they've

RALPH: Fallen on hard times, have you?

FLORENCE: This is just our house, where we live, this isn't *it*.

I mean it's tiny, isn't it?

RALPH: Perhaps we could take her along to the home.

FLORENCE: I don't think she's local – do you live near here?

NANCY: I don't live anywhere.

FLORENCE: There's other places, shelters and things, we can try and get you in somewhere.

RALPH: Miss Astley, would it hurt very much to tell us what happened?

CHAIRMAN: Well if she can't win herself somewhere to stay with her incredible sexual magnetism she'll have to try something else, won't she?

Time to take the stage again, Nancy. You've seen your share of urchins and guttersnipes, poor little match girls at the music hall, now's your chance...

NANCY: Please don't think the worst of me, but I've been living with a

With a man

With a rich man

He said he loved me, you see, and I loved him more than all the world. He said he'd marry me. But then I found out I wasn't the only

one, he'd been carrying on with other girls. So I packed my bags and I left him.

FLORENCE: We're very sorry to hear that, but

Well it's sadly not a very unusual story. If we took in every friend who

CHAIRMAN: Do your work, Nan.

NANCY sings a snatch of a 'waif' song, expressing her hopelessness.

NANCY looks at FLORENCE, who stands watching her, implacable. She turns it up a gear.

When I say I left him, that's the story he'd want me to say, can't believe even now I'm protecting him

The truth is

The truth is he beat me

CHAIRMAN: More.

NANCY: Every day.

CHAIRMAN: More, she ain't buying it.

NANCY: He drank, you see

He drank every day, he was drunk every day and when he drank he'd beat me, but then he'd say sorry and cause I loved him I'd forgive him

FLORENCE: I'm so sorry for what's happened Miss Astley but we've got to get to work. We'll happily lend you tuppence for the bus somewhere

NANCY sings another snatch of song. The lyrics get more woeful each time she sings again...

FLORENCE: I mean we don't actually have a spare room

NANCY sings another snatch of song.

FLORENCE: And we've the baby to look after and everything

NANCY: See, I was in trouble

I was going to have a baby – a while back, this is – but he wouldn't stop his drunken rages and one time he beat me so hard I lost it. The baby.

RALPH: Oh Miss Astley. Then what did you

NANCY sings another snatch of song.

FLORENCE: Weren't you angry with him for

NANCY sings a snatch of song that shows how angry she was.

FLORENCE: But couldn't you leave him then

CHAIRMAN: Go French, Nancy, ain't no one sadder. Bit of tristesse.

NANCY sings another snatch of song, this time in French.

CHAIRMAN: Yes, look, this is working, look at her.

NANCY sings another snatch of song.

NANCY: Two days ago he found a box of matches in the house that wasn't his, I don't know how it got there, he probably brought it back from the pub but he thought I'd had a gentleman in the house and that's when he hit me and did this (*Her cheek.*) and he beat me so hard I thought I wouldn't get up.

Then he threw me out without a penny, nothing but this dress and these boots.

CHAIRMAN: Go on, Nancy!

NANCY sings.

CHAIRMAN: More!

NANCY sings.

CHAIRMAN: Sadder!

NANCY sings, even sadder.

CHAIRMAN: Sadder!

NANCY sings another snatch of song, seemingly the saddest girl in the world...

FLORENCE: Oh I can't bear it.

Alright, go on, you can stay. Stay with us. For a week. Just to get you back on your feet, alright?

NANCY: Thank you.

RALPH: Right, if that's settled. I'm late. Anything I can get you, Miss Astley, before I go.

NANCY: No, thank you.

RALPH: Then I'll see you – both – tonight.

RALPH leaves, kissing FLORENCE and the baby.

NANCY: Your husband is very kind. You both are.

FLORENCE: My husband?

FLORENCE laughs.

NANCY: What?

FLORENCE: Ralph's not my husband. He's my brother.

NANCY: Oh.

CHAIRMAN: *Ohhh.*

FLORENCE: The baby's not ours. His mother used to lodge with us, and we took on the baby when she got poorly and died.

Me with a husband. The thought!

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel.

CHAIRMAN: So she's in! Don't she always fall on her feet, our Nancy? Shame that Florence thinks Nancy's had her heart broken by a bloke, but let's not worry about that for now.

Turns out Florence and Ralph are big in the local labour movement – we're a long way from the West End here, ladies and gentlemen, but you know our Nan, she can make herself a stage anywhere.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel.

FLORENCE and RALPH's parlour. FLORENCE, RALPH and NANCY are there, with their friends ARCHIE, JOSEPH and ANNIE and two other fellow socialists, LAURENCE and FRANK.

A curtain separates the room from the kitchen.

RALPH: And this is Nancy Astley – our friends Archie

ARCHIE: *(Shaking hands.)* Hello

NANCY: Hello

RALPH: Joseph

JOSEPH: *(Shaking hands.)* Hello

ANNIE: *(Proffering her hand.)* Annie. *(Looking at NANCY's face.)* Was it a girl did that? Girls always go for the eyes.

NANCY: No, um

ARCHIE: Are you a comrade Miss Astley?

FLORENCE: Nancy's just staying with us for a few days, she's had a hard time.

RALPH: Right, let's get started. Now where's my agenda?

The others all find chairs. NANCY picks up a piece of paper.

NANCY: Is this it?

RALPH: Er, no, don't worry though. Here it is.

I call to order this meeting of the Bethnal Green chapter of the Socialist League.

FLORENCE: Order!

The kettle whistles offstage.

RALPH: Florrie, will you take the minutes?

FLORENCE: I've just got to make the tea...

NANCY leaps up.

NANCY: I'll do it.

NANCY goes out to the kitchen, through the curtain.

RALPH: Right, first on the list as usual: any volunteers for leafleting the park this weekend?

NANCY comes back through the curtain with the teapot in her hand.

To music from the band, she pours tea in the manner of a ballerina – not yet a proficient one – for FLORENCE, RALPH and the guests, with a kind of bow/curtsey when she's finished.

Clack.

CHAIRMAN: Oh yes, ladies and gentlemen, Miss Nancy Astley is Making Herself Indispensable. And blow me if the parlour ain't just as full the next night...

The group rearrange themselves.

FLORENCE is talking quietly to ANNIE.

FLORENCE: Then he beat her and she lost the child.

ANNIE: Oh the poor love.

FLORENCE: I tell you, rich men are the worst.

ANNIE: Why's her hair so short?

RALPH: So I've a letter here about the rally at Conway Hall after the Socialist Solidarity March – they're programming speeches from all the local groups, and we're invited to put up a speaker to do five minutes on the subject of our choice.

ARCHIE: Who else is coming?

RALPH reads from his papers. The baby cries, offstage.

RALPH: The SDF, ILP, London Marxists, Scottish Marxists, Union of Unionists, everyone really. What shall we talk about?

JOSEPH: Housing? The slum problem?

ANNIE: Women.

FLORENCE: Yes!

JOSEPH: The woman question isn't a socialist matter, is it?

FLORENCE: Of course it is. If we're trying to build a better, fairer society, aren't half of the people in that society going to be women? So oughtn't we be talking about and to women now, women of all classes?

The baby cries again.

Alright, I'm coming, Cyril.

NANCY pokes her head through the curtains.

NANCY: I'll do it.

RALPH: So the next question is who will speak?

ANNIE: Why not you, Ralph?

NANCY comes in through the curtain, holding the baby in one arm and the teapot in the other and to music, dances and pours the tea, with a bow/curtsey when she's finished.

Clack. The group shuffle themselves again, for the next night.

FLORENCE and ANNIE are at the table, copying out letters and addressing envelopes.

RALPH: So we're settled on the Woman Question. We've got a copy of Mary Wollstonecraft somewhere, haven't we?

FLORENCE: Oh but don't just do it with books, Ralphie. Talk about where we live and work, the things we see, the women who are our neighbours. Not just *theories*.

ANNIE: Is that someone's stomach rumbling?

ARCHIE: So sorry. Came straight from work.

FLORENCE: You should have said. I'll make some sandwiches.

NANCY pokes her head through the curtains.

NANCY: I'll do it.

ANNIE: What about poor Nancy's story: thrown out by a rich gentleman with not a penny on her, beaten, abused, thrown into the gutter – they wouldn't hear of that happening to a man, would they?

RALPH: Alright, so *case studies*. I should write this down, where've I put my notebook?

NANCY comes back through the curtain, the baby strapped to her, the teapot in one hand and a plate of sandwiches in the other. To music from the band, she dances as she pours the tea and distributes the sandwiches, with a bow/curtsey at the end.

Clack. The group shuffle themselves again. They congregate around the table this time, everyone copying out letters and addressing envelopes.

FLORENCE is counting a pile of letters, checking them off against a list.

ANNIE: How many is it now?

FLORENCE: Sixty or so? We've done A to H.

ARCHIE: About another thirty over here.

RALPH: I'm not sure I want this many people to hear my speech.

RALPH gesticulates and knocks his cup of tea over, spilling it on the floor.

Oh dear look what I've

NANCY pokes her head through the curtains.

NANCY: I'll do it.

RALPH: Thank you Nancy.

NANCY comes back through the curtain, the baby strapped to her, the teapot in one hand, the plate of sandwiches attached to a hat on her head, and a mop in her other hand. To music from the band, she dances as she pours the tea, distributes the sandwiches, and mops up RALPH's spilled drink, with a bow/curtsey at the end.

Clack. The group shuffle themselves again. This time RALPH is marking-out a design on a large banner (on an easel), with a discussion going on at the same time.

ANNIE: New hat factory in Clerkenwell. I introduced myself to the foreman and he said 'I'm sorry love, I can't stand around talking, there's a Sanitary Inspector coming from the government'. So I said 'Yes, I'm the Sanitary Inspector, I'd like to see your ventilation system'.

His face – it looked like he'd ruptured something.

FLORENCE: 'But you're a girl!'

ANNIE: I think he'd have been less surprised to see a chicken doing my job.

ARCHIE: Make me ashamed to be a man, all these stories.

FLORENCE: Well that's why Ralph's speech is so important.

RALPH: No pressure.

RALPH turns the banner around. We can see the outline of a design that says 'Bethnal Green Socialist League'.

What d'you think?

ANNIE: It'll be nice when it's got colours.

RALPH: Yes, I'm rather short of time to get the painting done *and* my speech written.

He turns back to the table too quickly and catches his sleeve on his cup, spilling his tea.

Oh god I've done it *again*.

NANCY pokes her head through the curtains.

NANCY: I'll do it.

NANCY comes back through the curtain, the baby strapped to her, the teapot in one hand, the sandwich-hat on her head, a mop strapped to her leg and a paintbrush in her other hand. To music from the band, she dances as she pours the tea, distributes the sandwiches, and mops up RALPH's tea.

For her big finish, she goes to the easel and paints the design onto the banner, using the paintbrush. She turns the easel towards us to show the banner fully

painted, and bows/curtseys flamboyantly.

FLORENCE: Oh Nancy, how did we manage without you?

Clack. The socialists all leave.

CHAIRMAN: And that, ladies and gentlemen, is how you make yourself part of the furniture. Whitstable oyster girl into music hall masher into society sex pet into angel in the house.

NANCY brings in a basket of laundry which she folds.

And lord knows there's plenty for an angel to do – don't worry, I won't make you watch it, but it's cooking, cleaning, looking after that littl'un – I mean this ain't being on stage a couple of hours a night, no. More to do than she's time for, and no time at all for thinking of the old days.

NANCY picks up a pair of RALPH's trousers. She holds them up in front of her skirt. She takes a couple of steps, kicking the trousers out in front of her.

Well, I say that.

'Cause what would be the harm, really, in doing the housework dressed in trousers, long as she was changed back into a girl before the others got home?

NANCY puts the trousers on. She laughs. She walks around the room.

She goes out to the kitchen, and then returns (on another day) with a cloth and bucket.

She moves a chair to the fireplace. She steps up, enjoying how much easier it is – repeating the action, even – and then dusts the top of the picture above the mantelpiece.

Just for comfort, you understand. Nothing funny. Why not be comfortable when there's no one else around to see it? Where's the harm?

There's the sound of a key in the front door.

Oh, hello.

NANCY looks around in a panic, but there isn't time to change, so she attempts nonchalance. FLORENCE comes in and sees her.

FLORENCE: Oh

NANCY: Hello.

FLORENCE: You're um

You're on a chair.

NANCY: Doing the top of the mirror.

FLORENCE: 'Course.

NANCY: You're back early.

FLORENCE: I was on a visit close by, no point going back to the office just to leave again.

Cup of tea?

NANCY moves to come down.

I'll make it.

FLORENCE goes into the kitchen.

Nice day?

NANCY: Yes. Yeah. You?

FLORENCE: Not bad. Baby asleep?

NANCY: Yes he's had a good hour, I've got lots done.

FLORENCE comes back to the kitchen door.

FLORENCE: Sorry, I can't

D'you know you're wearing trousers?

No, 'course you do.

Are they Ralph's?

NANCY: Yes, sorry.

FLORENCE: You know Ralph, he wouldn't mind.

FLORENCE laughs.

NANCY: What is it?

FLORENCE: Just didn't think you were the type.

NANCY: What type?

FLORENCE: Annie thinks you might be one of us. I told her you couldn't be, you'd been living with a bloke, and anyway she's far too straight for that, I said.

You don't look very straight in my brother's trousers.

NANCY: Flo, the gentleman that threw me out

FLORENCE: Yes?

NANCY: It wasn't a gentleman, it was a lady.

FLORENCE: Oh.

NANCY: A rich lady.

FLORENCE: Right. And you were her

NANCY: I was kept.

FLORENCE: Kept?

NANCY: I lived at her house, she paid for everything, I was her. Well, her lover. Whenever she wanted.

FLORENCE: And she paid you?

NANCY: No. She looked after me well. I had everything I needed.

FLORENCE: But you left.

NANCY: I made her angry and she threw me out.

FLORENCE: How did you make her angry?

NANCY: I fucked the housemaid.

FLORENCE: That'll do it.

You said you'd been in trouble. The whole story, the drunk who beat you till you lost your baby.

NANCY: I'm sorry, I panicked. When I saw Cyril, and Ralph

FLORENCE: You can't just

You can't just lie like that it's really

Disrespectful, isn't it?

NANCY: I really needed help.

FLORENCE: It's actually quite disrespectful to all the women who've had that happen

NANCY: She hit me, she did hit me.

FLORENCE: She beat you?

NANCY: She hit me on the face with a book – that cut I had, you remember

FLORENCE: You should see some of the girls where I work, what's happened to them, it's not for making jokes about.

NANCY: It wasn't a joke

FLORENCE: You know there were times I caught you looking at Cyril and I thought you must be thinking of your baby, the baby you lost.

NANCY: I'm sorry

FLORENCE: This is real life, you know, not some kind of melodrama where you're the heroine and if it's not exciting enough you just lie about it, that's childish.

NANCY: I feel dreadful.

FLORENCE: Well, good.

NANCY: I mean if you want me to go, I'll

FLORENCE: Don't be silly.

You wouldn't be the first person to pretend to be straight when you're not, I suppose.

I need a drink, don't you?

NANCY: Yes. I don't think we've

FLORENCE: We'll go out.

NANCY: Should I change?

FLORENCE: Where we're going you don't need to.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel.

CHAIRMAN: The Boy in the Boat, they call it. You can work out the slang yourself. It's underneath a normal pub on a normal street in the East End – separate door round the back, down the stairs, and into what might as well be fairyland.

He clacks his gavel and then looks at it.

It's quicker than the bus, this.

A basement room in a pub. There is a bar, with a woman serving behind it, and a few customers at tables – all of them female, and a couple of them wearing trousers. In the corner is a battered old piano.

NANCY sits at a table with FLORENCE and ANNIE.

NANCY: I can't believe there's a pub especially for

ANNIE: This isn't the only one.

NANCY: So all the girls here

FLORENCE: Women

NANCY: all like girls.

ANNIE: Yes, that's the point.

FLORENCE: Which, if you're as bad as Annie at spotting them, is quite helpful.

ANNIE laughs.

ANNIE: I just assume everyone fancies me, gets me into awful trouble.

Got you right, though, didn't I?

NANCY: And those girls over there, they're, um

FLORENCE: *Women.* Honestly.

ANNIE: Gay girls. Sleep with men for money and women for love.

NANCY: Are they speaking English? I can't understand half the things they're saying.

They lean in to listen more carefully to a conversation at the next table between three extravagantly dressed prostitutes, JENNY, SUSIE and EMILY.

JENNY: 'Flat fucking is one thing, sir' I said, 'but if you want to watch us tipping the velvet you shall have to pay me for it, rather dear'.

NANCY: Yes, that. Tipping the velvet, what's that?

ANNIE: You really don't know?

JENNY: I said to him, 'I only does that sort of thing, sir, with my friends'

ANNIE: Tell her, Flo.

FLORENCE: Well, it's.

ANNIE: Go on.

FLORENCE: I'm trying not to miss the story.

It's this (*points to her tongue*), there (*points to NANCY's lap*).

NANCY: Ohh.

JENNY: Then swipe me if the bastard didn't put his hand in his pocket and pull out a sovereign, cool as you like.

EMILY: No!

ANNIE: Can't believe you've never tipped the velvet.

NANCY: I didn't say I hadn't done it. Just didn't know the word for it.

It's like a whole new language, it's brilliant.

Why are they looking at us?

ANNIE: Who?

NANCY: The girls there.

ANNIE: They're looking at you, Nancy.

NANCY: Oh no, I

ANNIE: Yes, look

FLORENCE: Maybe it's your hair

ANNIE: Ooh, she's coming over

JENNY is headed towards them. She leans towards NANCY.

JENNY: 'Scuse me, sweetheart.

NANCY: Hello?

JENNY: My pal Susie there

SUSIE waves.

Susie will have it that you're that Nan King, what used to work the halls with Kitty Butler. I've a shilling on it that you ain't her – will you settle it?

NANCY: I'm afraid you've lost your bet. I am Nan King.

ANNIE: What?

JENNY calls to the other table.

JENNY: You're bloody right and all, Suze – it is her, it's Nan King all right.

The rest of the room falls silent at this.

FLORENCE: What are they saying, Nan?

SUSIE and EMILY stand up from the table and come over. SUSIE shakes NANCY's hand.

SUSIE: Miss King I knew it was you the moment you came in. We had such happy times watching you and Miss Butler on the stage.

NANCY: You're very kind.

EMILY: Can't believe it.

ANNIE: You worked the halls? Did you really?

NANCY: Yes.

EMILY: You don't mean you didn't know your friend was a star?

JENNY: Her and Kitty Butler – there never was a pair of mashers like 'em. What a treat to find you here.

FLORENCE: Mashers?

EMILY: You know, girls in trousers.

JENNY: I have to say, we did wonder about you

SUSIE: What about Miss Butler – I heard she was a bit of a tom herself.

NANCY: You heard wrong, she wasn't.

EMILY: Not just a bit?

NANCY: Not at all.

SUSIE: And why don't we see you on the stage anymore?

NANCY: Oh, you know. Life got in the way...

JENNY calls across the room to the woman behind the bar.

JENNY: Here, Mrs Swindles – it's Nan King!

MRS SWINDLES: Give us a song, then!

NANCY laughs.

NANCY: No no, I couldn't.

EMILY: Yeah, go on, give us a song.

The piano is wheeled over towards them and someone sits down at it, plays a quick blast.

ANNIE: They won't let you get away with it, Nance.

SUSIE: Come on, Miss King, sing for us.

NANCY: Alright alright.

NANCY stands up. The women applaud. NANCY goes over to the piano, giving a little of her stage swagger. The audience love it.

NANCY sings a verse of the same song she sang in the double-act with KITTY.

KITTY appears in the room with them, but not visible to the others, only

NANCY.

KITTY starts to sing with NANCY.

After a few lines NANCY stops, unable to continue.

NANCY: Well, you know how it goes, there you go...

The crowd breaks into applause. Ghost KITTY smiles at NANCY. NANCY does an awkward little bow, shaking as she does so. She comes back to the table with ANNIE and FLORENCE.

ANNIE: Bloody hell, Nancy. For all that Florrie talks about you all the time

NANCY: Does she?

ANNIE: she's never said you were a music hall star.

FLORENCE: I didn't know.

NANCY looks up, sees Ghost KITTY looking at her. NANCY looks away.

Why did you never say?

NANCY: I don't know, feels a long time ago.

ANNIE: More drinks! No no, my turn. It's a celebration.

ANNIE stands up, moves towards the bar. KITTY comes to sit in ANNIE's vacated chair. NANCY tries not to look at her.

FLORENCE: You alright?

NANCY: Yes. You talk about me all the time, do you?

FLORENCE: Well, I

Some of the time.

What is it, Nan?

NANCY: D'you think we could go home?

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel.

CHAIRMAN: So Florence gets to go home with the star of the show, how about that ladies and gentlemen? Even if she don't know they're only going home to get away from a ghost.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Miss Nancy Astley is now going to attempt an Exorcism....

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel and brings NANCY and FLORENCE home to the parlour of FLORENCE's house. FLORENCE is holding a postcard.

FLORENCE: You were on the stage. I just can't believe it. You!

What a strange thing not to know about someone. You were famous enough to be on a postcard.

NANCY: I don't really think of it now.

FLORENCE: You were amazing! I wish I'd seen you at the music hall

To think there was a picture of you and this Kitty Butler behind the bar all this time and I never noticed it, never knew.

The apparition of KITTY emerges from a dark corner of the room and starts to move towards NANCY, holding a rose out to her.

NANCY grabs FLORENCE and kisses her, turning her around away from KITTY. KITTY disappears back into the shadows.

There's so much I don't know about you.

NANCY: What d'you want to know? I'll tell you anything.

KITTY appears again, this time through the door, again holding a rose.

Only not right now.

NANCY pushes FLORENCE's back against the door, shutting KITTY out. They kiss again, increasingly passionately.

NANCY sees KITTY appear elsewhere in the room several times, and each time manoeuvres FLORENCE towards that area so that she can push KITTY away – eg KITTY appears out of a drawer, and NANCY moves FLORENCE to sit on top of the chest of drawers, pushing KITTY's head back into the drawer as she does so. Or KITTY comes out of the middle of an armchair and NANCY flings FLORENCE down onto the chair to stop her. Eventually there are several performers all wearing KITTY's signature costume, and NANCY is increasingly busy trying to keep them at bay. FLORENCE, meanwhile, thinks she's being treated to a passionate sexual encounter. The act ends with NANCY putting

her head under FLORENCE's skirt, and as FLORENCE climaxes, all of the Ghost KITTYS finally disappear.

The next morning. NANCY and FLORENCE are entwined on the floor on top of a collection of cushions and under a blanket. FLORENCE wakes to see NANCY looking at her.

NANCY: Good morning.

FLORENCE: Good morning. That was, um

Unexpected. Lovely. I didn't even know you were interested.

NANCY pulls FLORENCE close and kisses her. She runs a hand over FLORENCE's shoulder.

NANCY: What's this, here?

FLORENCE: Fell on the fire irons when I was seven. Mother said we shouldn't be chasing round the parlour, me and Ralph.

NANCY: He was chasing you?

FLORENCE: I was chasing him.

NANCY: It's the only blemish I can find on you, it's very

You're very

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel.

CHAIRMAN: Wait!

Now hang on a minute: sweet as all this might be, don't we think it's a bit dangerous? Think about it, Nancy. Bit of thinking music, lads?

The band play some thinking music.

Sounds like Nancy's falling for this one, don't it? At the very least, *warming*. Remember what happened last time she gave herself to someone, gave her heart and soul? Disaster. Reckon she can survive that again? Place your bets, ladies and gentlemen...

NANCY: We should get dressed.

FLORENCE: Yes, Ralph'll be down.

They get up and collect their clothes from around the room, putting them on.

I'm very what?

NANCY: Sorry?

FLORENCE: You said I'm very

NANCY: Oh. Very good. You're a good person.

FLORENCE: That's not what I thought you were going to say at all.

FLORENCE picks up the postcard of NANCY and KITTY and looks at it.

Were you together, you and Kitty Butler?

NANCY: Ha. Well, yes. Yes, for a while.

FLORENCE: You can see it in the picture.

NANCY: Can you?

FLORENCE: You can see there's something between you.

NANCY looks.

NANCY: Yes a hatstand and a bicycle.

The band oblige NANCY with a cymbal strike. NANCY almost hears it, has an idea.

FLORENCE takes the postcard back.

FLORENCE: Very funny. Were you in love with her?

To vamping from the band, NANCY becomes a stand-up comedian...

NANCY: Let me tell you about Kitty Butler. I'm not saying she was vain, but when we made love she'd shout her own name out. And jealous? God she was jealous – one time she looked at my calendar and started asking me who May was.

Cymbal strike.

FLORENCE: Right.

So what are we going to say to Ralph?

Clack. RALPH comes in and sits at the table, which NANCY and FLORENCE set for dinner:

CHAIRMAN: Yes, good work, Nancy, that's how you keep your heart locked up. Ladies and gentlemen, Miss Nancy Astley, Joker in the Pack....

RALPH: Well I for one am delighted. May I say I've wished it ever since you showed up here, Nance?

NANCY: Is that right?

RALPH: Though as Florence's next of kin I'll have to ask you about your prospects. Are you from a good family?

FLORENCE: I don't know anything about your family, that's so funny.

NANCY: Is it?

FLORENCE: You never talk about them at all.

NANCY: Well there's not that much to

FLORENCE and RALPH wait for NANCY to tell them.

NANCY goes into comedian mode.

Family? Who needs 'em? Let me tell you about my family...

I'm not saying we were poor, but the house was so small, you had to leave the room to change your mind. My dad's not spoken to my mum in 18 months – he doesn't like to interrupt her. Next-door neighbour said to my mother, 'I'm going to the doctors, I don't like the look of my husband'. My mum said 'I'll come with you, I hate the sight of mine'.

Cymbal strike.

RALPH: What are we having?

FLORENCE: Oyster pie.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel. NANCY and FLORENCE sit by the fire, polishing some cutlery.

FLORENCE: I think it was when I came in and you had Ralph's trousers on. How funny. No, it must have been before that, maybe that's just when I acknowledged it.

D'you remember that day in Soho Square, with the ice cream? I had such a funny feeling about you, not even being attracted to you – I'm sure I *was* attracted to you – more a feeling you were going to be significant. Does that make sense? Did you feel that?

NANCY: I picked you out to talk to, didn't I?

They kiss.

FLORENCE: You didn't answer my question.

NANCY: What question?

FLORENCE: When were you attracted to me?

NANCY: Oh, I've got a terrible memory – I went to the doctors today and he said to me, 'Have you been taking the medicine I gave you for your memory loss?' I said 'No I forgot' and he said 'well if you don't take your medicine, we can't fix the problem' and I said 'what problem's that then?' I'd probably have a better memory if I didn't drink. I say no to alcohol, it just doesn't listen. Talking of drinking, a skeleton goes into a bar. He says 'give me a pint of beer and a mop'...

Cymbal strike.

FLORENCE: You're funny, I'll give you that. Can't get a straight answer out of you, but you're good at funny.

NANCY: I'm good at lots of things.

NANCY kisses her. It heats up. The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel.

CHAIRMAN: Trouble is, when you sleep with your housemate, things escalate pretty quickly, strings get attached and before you know it you're half of a couple.

FLORENCE and NANCY are tying small embroidered banners onto long sticks.

FLORENCE: Maybe when Cyril's a bit older we could move him into Ralph's room. Then we can have the bedroom to ourselves, stop having to be so quiet in there. Does that sound good?

Sorry, I'm sort of assuming you'll still be here, I don't know if you I don't know what your plans are.

NANCY: Haven't really got any.

FLORENCE: Well I suppose you know you're welcome to stay here as long as you want to. Ralph loves you. We all do.

NANCY: Love? Lord, don't talk to me about love. Last time I told a girl I loved her she

FLORENCE: Nance, don't.

Why d'you keep doing that?

NANCY: What?

FLORENCE: Changing the subject, making a joke.

NANCY: Do I?

FLORENCE: Yes. All the time. God's sake, Nance, do you not even realise?

It's like you're here but you're not really here. Like you're just marking time.

Are you just marking time? 'Cause if you are, just be honest about it, please.

NANCY: Flo, I love it here. You and Ralph and Cyril. You've been so kind to me, taking me in and

FLORENCE: You don't owe me anything for that

NANCY: I don't mean that, I

FLORENCE: You don't have to sleep with me to stay. I'm not like your rich woman, I don't want a kept lover I want a partner, someone here because they want to be.

NANCY: That's not why I'm

FLORENCE: So what is it? Are you waiting for something else, something better to come along? Waiting for someone to come back?

NANCY: No, I'm

Please, it's

FLORENCE: It's what?

NANCY: It's

FLORENCE: Yes?

RALPH dashes in, a piece of paper and a pencil in his hand.

RALPH: Is the plural female *persons* or female *people*?

FLORENCE: What? Just say women.

RALPH: No, I've said women I need to vary it.

FLORENCE: Female people. D'you want me to read the

There's a knock at the door. RALPH goes.

NANCY: Flo

FLORENCE: I haven't got time for this now, everyone's coming, we've got to go.

ANNIE comes in.

ANNIE: You won't believe it Flo, there's loads of them, Joseph seems to have got the whole factory

As many people as can be mustered surge into the room, including ARCHIE, JOSEPH and the other socialists we met earlier.

I haven't done enough sandwiches for all of them.

FLORENCE: It's a socialist rally – people will share their sandwiches.

JOSEPH: Come in, come in. Who wants a banner? There's lots if you want one. Banners, donation buckets.

FLORENCE: Joseph, are you and Archie going to hold the big one?
Archie?

ARCHIE: I was going to leaflet as we go along, I won't have enough hands.

RALPH comes back in, holding the baby.

RALPH: Can't find my shoes.

FLORENCE: Next to the stove.

ANNIE: How's the speech, Ralph?

RALPH: Yes no pretty happy with it in fact.

NANCY takes the baby. RALPH goes to the kitchen to get his shoes.

ANNIE: How's the speech?

FLORENCE: Haven't heard it, he's done it all himself.

FLORENCE picks up a satchel, goes to ARCHIE and puts the strap over his head.

Here, put this on. Then you can leaflet with one hand and hold the banner with the other, how's that?

ARCHIE: Yes, good. We should be off, you know.

FLORENCE: Let's do it.

ANNIE: *(To NANCY, re the banners.)* D'you want one?

FLORENCE: I don't think Nancy's coming, don't

NANCY: No, I'll come.

FLORENCE: Alright.

FLORENCE stands up on a chair.

Hello! We're going to head out in a minute, obviously we'll try and stay behind the big banner but we might get separated so I just wanted to say

Well, thank you. We've never had this many people in here, this is amazing. Thank you Annie – our group secretary – she's been round here every night for a month copying out letters telling people about

today. And Archie, who's up early every Sunday, leafleting outside every chapel from here to Hackney. All of you giving your time to swell the ranks. I'm looking around at all of you and it's amazing, you're amazing.

It's a wonderful thing that's happening today. All of these groups that've been so divided over ideology, marching together today and saying solidarity is more important than any of it because we are a community of ideas. We know what we believe in and it's so simple – a better, fairer life for everyone – you can't argue with that. If that's naive then we should strive for more naivety. I don't think there's a rich man's salon in all of Kensington that is as happy as this little parlour is now. Let's be really proud, let's march proudly. And let's go!

FLORENCE steps down off the chair and everyone applauds and picks up their banners etc, ready to leave.

Clack.

CHAIRMAN: Right, who's ready for a good march? Ha, didn't think so.

Let's save you the shoe leather – what's the point of having this (*His gavel.*) if we can't scoot forward a few hours. Hundreds of people crammed into Conway Hall for the speeches, everyone's blood up after three miles of marching and cheering and righteousness. You'll have to play the audience – don't worry, I'll do the talking for you – here's our Ralph, eighth on the bill so you're likely getting a bit restless by the time he gets up and says...

RALPH appears at a lectern, visibly nervous.

RALPH: I want to talk to you about women. I shall try to keep my remarks suitably um, brief.

CHAIRMAN: (*Heckling.*) Hurray!

RALPH: Women. The fairer sex. The angel in the house. The eternal mystery. Yet why should they be a mystery to us, are their joys and woes not in many ways the same as a man's? Has a female not the same number of arms and legs, eyes and ears as a man? They have

different hair, I grant you, but is that reason enough on which to base at worst our suspicion, at best our ignorance? After all, every other person in the world is a woman

CHAIRMAN: (*Heckling.*) I'm not!

RALPH: I mean every *other* person every *second* person – no you're right that isn't clear. Fifty percent of person – people – of the people

What I mean is, be they ladies, girls, or something in between, women are half of society – perhaps the forgotten half, but may we not also say the better half, because who among us has not benefited from the care of a good woman, be that a mother, a wife, a sister

CHAIRMAN: (*Heckling.*) Or a tart!

RALPH pretends not to hear.

RALPH: Since the dawn of time we have shared the earth with women – without Eve, there wouldn't have been Adam, without Cleopatra no Anthony, without Juliet no Romeo. But have we ever really talked to them, have we ever really taken the time to find out what they feel?

CHAIRMAN: (*Heckling.*) They never stop telling us!

RALPH: We – We pass them on the street every day, but do we ever stop to think what's going on under that skirt?

CHAIRMAN: (*Heckling.*) This is shit!

RALPH: But women's issues – if you'll just let me

CHAIRMAN: (*Heckling, another voice.*) What's this got to do with socialism?

RALPH: Well I do have quite a lot of case studies I was going to

CHAIRMAN: (*Heckling.*) We've come from Yorkshire for this!

(*Heckling, running through accents.*) And Birmingham! – We're from Pontypridd – All the way from the industrial heartland of Norfolk...

RALPH: Please, there are things that I would very much like to say, things that are very – things that are *important* and

NANCY rushes onto the stage and stands next to RALPH.

Nancy? What are you

NANCY: It's alright. I know how to do this.

CHAIRMAN: (*Heckling.*) Who the hell's that, then?

NANCY: Now come on gents, let's hear a feller out. Would it threaten your manhood so much to give the women of the world five minutes of your time?

CHAIRMAN: (*Heckling.*) Who's looking after your kids?

NANCY: Haven't got any, next question.

CHAIRMAN: (*Heckling.*) Calm down sweetheart, keep your bloomers on.

NANCY: I'm perfectly calm, it's you that's bellowing.

You know what your trouble is, fellas? You just won't hear anybody out.

NANCY sings a song in support of women's rights. After the first chorus:

CHAIRMAN: (*Heckling.*) Why'd you think you're better than us?

NANCY: Better? I never said better – I was only looking for equal, but if better's the word that springs to mind.

Like Mr Banner here said, women are half the world, aren't we?

RALPH: Yes you are.

NANCY: Well how are you lot going to make this better, fairer society you keep talking about without taking half of humanity with you?

RALPH: A very good point, Miss Astley.

NANCY: The law don't think so, Mr Banner. The law says if I get married, I become my husband's legal property. Me, my body and everything I own, my children, everything down to the boots on my feet. For him to do whatever he wants with.

RALPH: But that's no way to treat a fellow human being.

NANCY: So what we all going to do about it?

NANCY sings another verse and chorus of the song.

And we haven't even started on the vote...

RALPH: Why should it be the case that a woman gets paid half as much as the man standing next to her, doing the same hours in the same job?

NANCY: Exactly – why should it?

Our daughters and granddaughters aren't going to stand for it – why should we?

NANCY sings another verse and chorus of the song.

You know, there's something in the air, lads

RALPH: The women are coming!

NANCY: You can ignore it or embrace it – up to you – but good luck trying to stop it.

One day half of all members of parliament will be women.

RALPH: Do you think so?

NANCY: I know so. And half of all judges, bishops, half of the England cricket team

RALPH: What else are you suggesting? Women wearing trousers?

NANCY: One day, Mr Banner, one day!

Anyone fancy helping me out this time?

A sheet is lowered onto the stage, with the lyrics to the chorus on it. NANCY guides the audience through singing the lyrics.

One more time!

NANCY leads the audience through a repeat of the chorus, bringing the song to an end.

Thank you! I've been Nancy Astley, this is Mr Ralph Banner and we've had a speech *and* a singsong, can't be bad can it? Good night Conway Hall!

NANCY leads RALPH in a bow. He beams out into the hall.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel and we're backstage after the speech. NANCY and RALPH are surrounded by people, including FLORENCE and ANNIE.

ANNIE: I've never seen anything like it. The way you turned them around.

NANCY: Ralph's speech did it.

RALPH: I'm still shaking

ANNIE: They should give you a lecture tour. Every town hall in the country!

NANCY steps aside from the group slightly to speak to FLORENCE.

NANCY: Are you angry?

FLORENCE: No, not at all. You saved the day, didn't you? And you stopped Ralph looking silly, so thank you for that.

Only I saw you up there, singing and dancing

NANCY: At a serious meeting – I'm so sorry

FLORENCE: No it was good. You were good. You were really good.

NANCY: I know you think I haven't been listening when you talk but I have. I mean maybe I didn't at first, I know I was a bit

FLORENCE: No I can tell you've been listening. I'm sorry about before, at the house, what I Thing is, Nance, I've properly fallen for you.

I haven't told you, because we don't really talk, do we? Properly talk. And I don't really know what you – I mean I'm scared that you don't

Because you were really good up there. And it just made me wonder if that's what you're supposed to do – being on stage, I mean. If maybe you need to go and do that.

I can't keep you here if that's what you

NANCY: You're not keeping me here

FLORENCE: Oh

NANCY: No, I mean, you're not keeping me here, I'm here because

FLORENCE looks over NANCY's shoulder to see a woman approach them and stop.

FLORENCE: Someone to talk to you.

NANCY turns around. It's KITTY.

KITTY: Hello Nan.

Could I speak to you a moment? Please?

NANCY turns back to look at FLORENCE.

FLORENCE: Go on.

NANCY: Just. Don't go anywhere, I need to

I hadn't finished, alright? Don't go anywhere

FLORENCE: I'll be over here.

FLORENCE steps away from NANCY and KITTY, goes to stand with RALPH and ANNIE.

KITTY: You've not forgotten me, I hope?

I've been looking for you all over London. I heard you'd been spotted singing in an East End pub so I went there to ask and they said you'd be here. Didn't quite believe it, you doing politics, but then I walk in to see you up on the stage, speaking, I'm astonished.

Hello.

You seem very different.

NANCY: I'm older.

KITTY: Yes, me too.

NANCY: Are you here alone?

KITTY: Walter's in Liverpool. He has shares in a hall up there, and he's rented a house for us. I'm to join him when it's ready.

NANCY: And you're still working?

KITTY: Not so much. We had an act together

NANCY: But not anymore?

KITTY: Walter's busy with the managing now. And then – we kept it quiet, but I was ill. I was going to have a child, then I. Didn't.

NANCY: I'm sorry.

KITTY: We've quite forgotten it now. It only means I'm not quite as strong as I

And what about you? Was that your girl?

NANCY: Yes.

KITTY: I can't stop staring at you.

Where did you go? We tried so hard to find you. When we couldn't, I thought – oh Nan, I thought you might have hurt yourself.

NANCY: *You* hurt me, Kitty.

KITTY: D'you think I don't know it? I feel ashamed to even talk to you.
I'm so sorry.

I've thought so many times about finding you, and planned what I'd say when I did. I can't leave you now without saying it.

NANCY: I don't want to hear it.

KITTY: You have to know. You mustn't think that I did what I did easily, or thoughtlessly. You mustn't think it didn't break my heart.

NANCY: Why did you do it, then?

KITTY: I was a fool. I thought my life on the stage was dearer than anything. I thought I'd be a star.

And I didn't ever think I'd really, really lose you.

Nan, come back. Come back to me.

Please.

NANCY: Come back to you? You're Walter's wife.

KITTY: There's nothing – like that – between him and me now. If we were only a little careful...

ANNIE comes over, proffering a hand to KITTY.

ANNIE: Miss Butler?

KITTY: Yes?

ANNIE: Forgive me interrupting, I thought it was you – Annie Page, I'm the secretary of the Bethnal Green Socialists – never saw you on stage, sadly, but we've heard all about you from Nancy. What brings you here today?

KITTY: I was. Just passing.

ANNIE: I suddenly wondered if Nancy might persuade you into speaking for us one day, maybe singing even – always looking for people to help spread the message. A famous face like yours could do us the power of good, to be honest. Particularly a female face.

KITTY: Yes I'm sorry I'm not really. In London anymore. Not really famous anymore, either.

ANNIE: There's still a lot of girls with your picture under the pillow.

KITTY: I'm sorry, I don't really have time for anything like

ANNIE: Right, no of course. Well you have to ask.

KITTY: I'm sorry, I really must speak to Miss King here

ANNIE: No, yes, you must have a lot to talk about. Years!

KITTY: Yes. Thank you.

ANNIE: Sorry to interrupt. Sorry, Nancy.

ANNIE goes. KITTY turns back to NANCY.

KITTY: Sorry.

NANCY: No.

KITTY: No what?

NANCY: No, I won't come back to you.

KITTY: Why, Nan?

NANCY: I saw the way you flinched. With Annie.

KITTY: I didn't want to be interrupted.

NANCY: You didn't like that she was a tom. Terrified someone might see you, someone might think

I don't want to be careful anymore. That's all I ever had from you.
We were so careful, we might as well have been dead.

KITTY: You belong with me.

NANCY looks over at FLORENCE.

NANCY: I belong here.

NANCY goes to walk back towards FLORENCE.

KITTY: Nan

NANCY: Don't call me that, no one calls me that now.

KITTY lowers her veil. She turns to leave.

The CHAIRMAN clacks his gavel and stops the action.

CHAIRMAN: Whoa whoa whoa, hang on a minute ladies and gentlemen this ain't right.

What are you doing, Nancy? Think about it.

NANCY: I *am* thinking about it.

NANCY turns and looks directly at the CHAIRMAN. He steps back, shocked.

D'you think I can't hear you? D'you think I don't know you're there?

CHAIRMAN: What?

NANCY: Everything I do, you're there, commenting. I can see you.

CHAIRMAN: Is that right?

Then might I suggest you give me a listen?

Kitty Butler, standing there, begging you to take her back – the girl you've been thinking of all this time.

Letting her get away again, the love of your life? And taking the theatre with her, too. For what, endless penance in the Church of Bleeding Hearts?

NANCY: Kitty made me blow out the candle before we'd get under the covers together.

I've got a new girl now, who's not ashamed.

CHAIRMAN: You don't love her.

NANCY: What?

CHAIRMAN: Not like you loved Kitty.

NANCY: No, I love her better. She's good.

CHAIRMAN: Oh, *good* is she? Nancy these people haven't paid their money, come all this way to see you end up with someone 'cause she's *good*. To see you settle. They're not here for. Domestic bliss.

Kitty Butler just waiting for you – you could do a song together before you go, look. Miss Nan King Rescues Herself from Obscurity

NANCY: I don't want to.

The CHAIRMAN turns to the band.

CHAIRMAN: Let's help her out, lads.

The band strike up.

Miss Nancy King, everyone!

NANCY: No.

NANCY goes to the red curtain at the back of the stage and tears it down. A couple of stage hands on a tea break are surprised behind it.

NANCY: I don't need this –

She destroys another element of the stage.

Or this – Or you!

NANCY runs at the chairman and wrestles the gavel out of his hand. The band grinds to a halt.

NANCY and the CHAIRMAN stand staring at each other, panting.

CHAIRMAN: Come on Nancy, give it back.

You think you can do without it, do you? All this?

Don't you understand, Nancy? You think you can get through life by being you? No. What is there about *you* for anyone to love?

You're not enough, you know that. That's why we've worked so hard, built all this.

NANCY: And I want to stop.

CHAIRMAN: You can't risk it, Nancy.

NANCY: I'm going to.

CHAIRMAN: This is not how the show ends!

NANCY: It's not your show.

She clacks the gavel in the air and hears that it makes the same sound as when the CHAIRMAN does it.

Ha! See?

She points the gavel at the band and clacks it.

The band start to play.

CHAIRMAN: Nancy.

NANCY: Now shut up.

NANCY clacks the gavel again and the band stop.

CHAIRMAN: Don't stop.

One of them isn't sure, and tries to start up again. NANCY clacks the gavel.

NANCY: Thank you gentlemen, ladies, that'll be all. Off you go. Go on.

The band get up and start to shuffle off.

CHAIRMAN: Come on, lads.

NANCY: And you.

NANCY clacks. The CHAIRMAN raises his hands in defeat.

CHAIRMAN: Alright alright.

Ladies and gentlemen, I give you

NANCY: Go!

NANCY clacks and the CHAIRMAN slinks away.

Flo?

FLORENCE steps closer to NANCY, looking at the pulled-down curtain.

FLORENCE: What's going on Nance?

NANCY: Don't worry, come with me.

NANCY leads FLORENCE to centre-stage.

FLORENCE: Was that Kitty?

NANCY: Yes.

FLORENCE: And did she

NANCY: Yes.

FLORENCE: So you're going, are you?

NANCY: You're right, Flo, we don't talk properly. I mean I don't. I want to, I just

Kitty broke my heart. She was the first. And I thought I'd never be able to stitch it back together. Even when I met you I was still thinking about her,

FLORENCE: Were you?

NANCY: And I couldn't come to you properly, 'cause I was scared of it happening again, or happening worse. I'm so sorry.

But it's not like that anymore. This is everything I want, this is real. This is so real I can't think why I ever wanted anything else.

You're the best person I've ever met. You make me want to be better.
I'm not scared anymore. I love you.

FLORENCE: Do you?

NANCY: I really do.

FLORENCE: I thought you'd gone.

NANCY: Please don't make me go back on the stage.

FLORENCE: I won't.

NANCY: Let me love you, and be with you, be your sweetheart, and
your comrade. I know I'm a mess and I'm still a bit broken and I
don't feel like this is the greatest offer in the world but will you have
me?

FLORENCE smiles, nods.

Tell me that's a yes.

FLORENCE leans in and kisses NANCY.

NANCY lifts the gavel and clacks it. Blackout.

THE END

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